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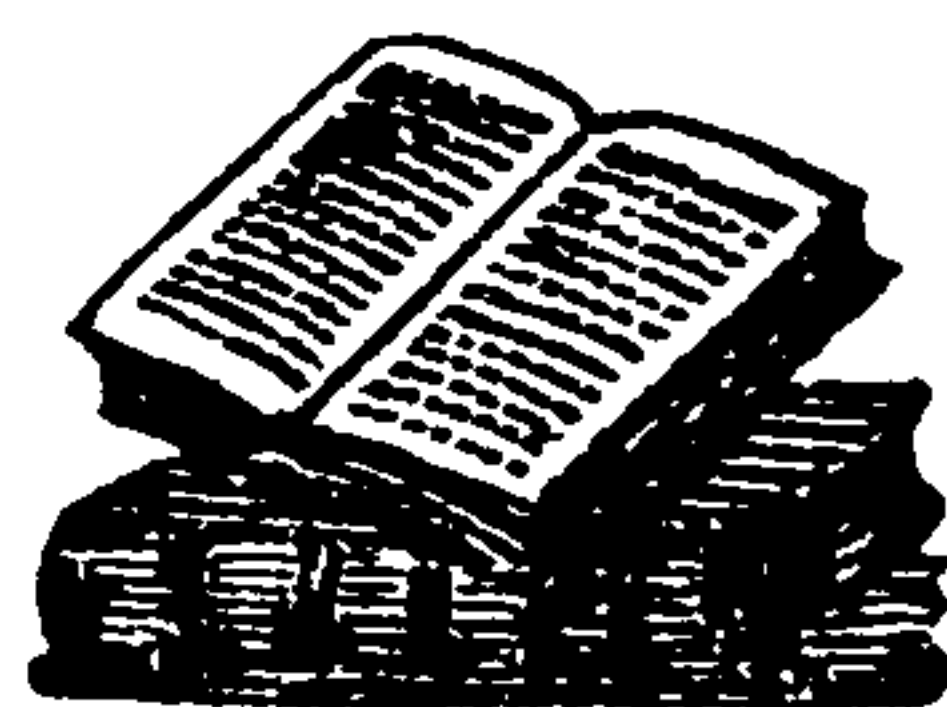
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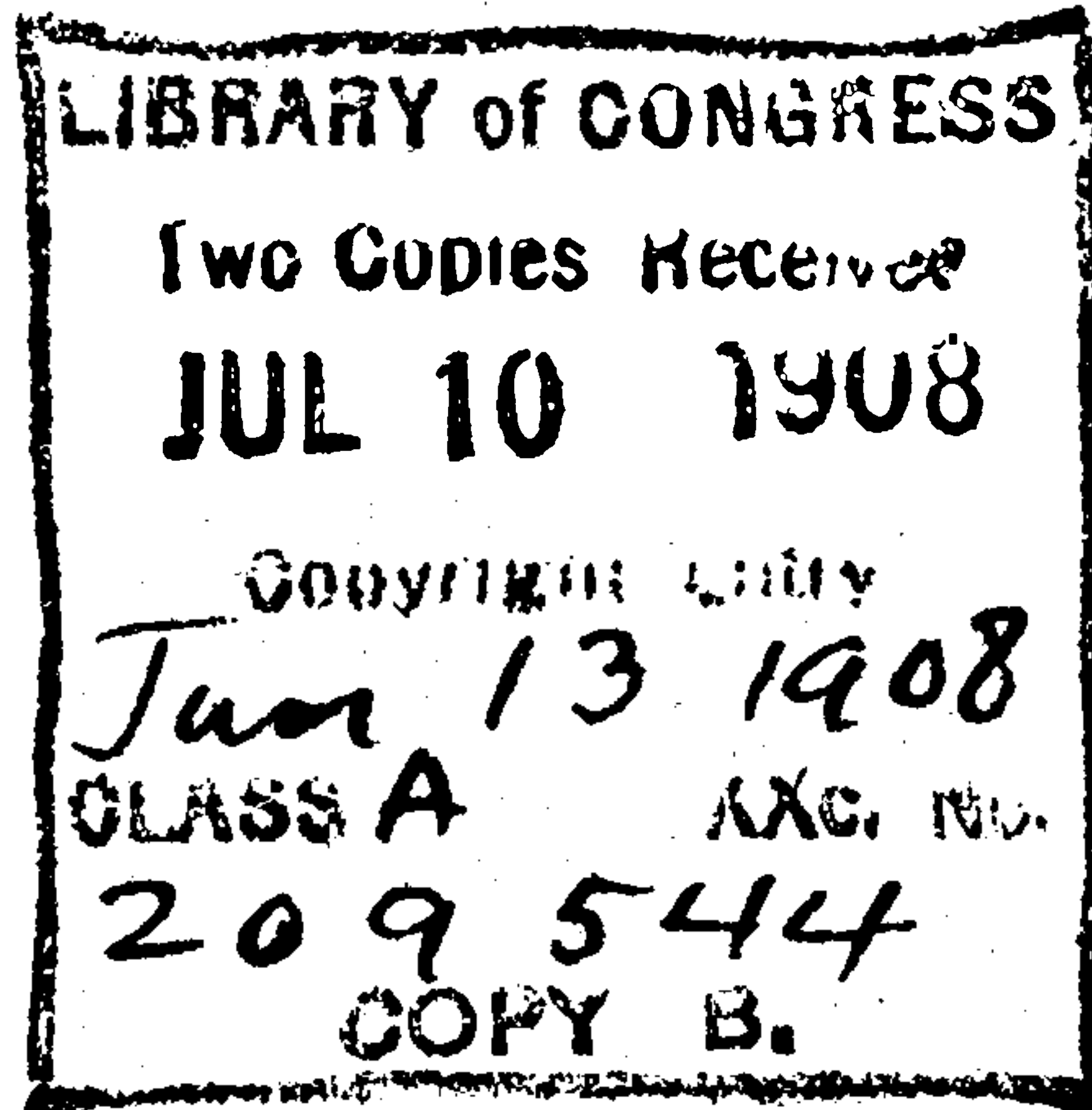
The
Young Christian
and the
Early Church

By
John Wesley Conley, D. D.



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THE following facts should be borne in mind in connection with this book :

1. The division into two parts of ten chapters each is for the purpose of supplying two courses of study, each covering a period of ten weeks. Since, however, there is a natural division into these two periods, each part is in a measure complete in itself, and may be studied independent of the other.

2. These studies are not a commentary on nor an exposition of the books of Acts, but they are a series of lessons based upon the Acts and the Epistles, setting forth those features which were most prominently connected with the early growth of Christianity.

3. These lessons are for busy young people, such as constitute the rank and file of our young people's societies. It is hoped, however, that they may prove helpful also to students, teachers, ministers, and others.

4. The treatment of each topic is suggestive rather than exhaustive. Many questions are necessarily left unanswered and much interesting matter is wholly untouched.

5. The central thought in these studies is growth. The early churches were instinct with the forces

of enlargement. The aim, therefore, has been to select for discussion those features which bear more or less directly upon this phase of early Christianity.

6. The "Suggested Topics" are designed for papers and discussions. They should be assigned a week or more beforehand. Rightly used these may be made a very helpful feature of the work. Scriptural quotations are all from the "American Standard Revision."

7. The writer of these lessons is well aware that his work is marked with many imperfections. It has been done in a very limited time, and amid the ever-pressing demands of a very busy pastorate. As he has found a rich blessing in the preparation of these lessons, his earnest prayer is that others may be blessed in reading and studying them.

OMAHA, May, 1908.

J. W. C.

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Part I

Jerusalem as Center

“To the Jew First”

CHAPTER I

A GENERAL SURVEY OF THE PERIOD

THE period which we are about to study is included in the first twelve chapters of the book of Acts. It extends over twelve years, from about A. D. 33 to A. D. 45 or, from the ascension of our Lord to the beginning of the first missionary journey of the Apostle Paul. There is a tradition, which Farrar pronounces probable, that the apostles were bidden not to leave Jerusalem for their general missionary work until twelve years from the time of Christ's resurrection. Whether or not there is anything to this tradition, it is true that when the church was scattered by persecution the apostles still remained in Jerusalem, and did no work so far as the records show, outside of that city until near the close of this twelve years.

1. Divisions of this period

This period falls naturally into two parts: The first, wholly Jewish, extends to the martyrdom of Stephen, A. D. 37. Up to that date the work of making converts was confined entirely, so far as can be determined, to the Jews and to Jerusalem. Then with the scattering of the church a transitional period was entered upon, extending to the time

when Paul began his direct aggressive missionary operations to the Gentiles.

2. Rulers at this time

Great changes were taking place in the political world. Tiberius Cæsar, emperor at Rome, was an old man, incompetent and debauched. He died A. D. 37, the same year that Stephen was stoned, and was succeeded by the infamous Caligula, whose attempt to place his own statue as an object of worship in the temple at Jerusalem may have been the reason that the Jews for a time ceased their persecution of Christians (Acts 9 : 31). Caligula was assassinated—A. D. 41—and Claudius succeeded him and reigned until poison, administered by his wife, ended his course and Nero became emperor, A. D. 54.

Pontius Pilate, by whose judgment Christ was crucified, continued procurator of Judea until Caligula became emperor when, upon a visit to Rome, “wearied with misfortunes,” he committed suicide. Petronius, procurator of Syria, then administered affairs in Judea until A. D. 41, when Herod Agrippa I was made king of all Palestine, and reigned three years, when he died a miserable death (Acts 8 : 23). Judea then again became a Roman province with Fadus as procurator.

3. Persons active in the church

The eleven apostles, or the Twelve, including Matthias, chosen in Judas’ place, are all mentioned

by name, but Peter stands in the foreground. He preached on the day of Pentecost, and was the leader in the significant events immediately following. He dealt with Ananias and Sapphira, and later with Simon Magus. He was used to heal Æneas and to raise Dorcas to life. He preached the gospel to the Gentile Cornelius and was miraculously delivered from prison when Herod was about to behead him. In much of the work which Peter did, John was closely associated with him. Stephen, one of the seven set apart for a special work in the church, became a fearless preacher of the gospel, and was the first martyr. Philip, also one of the seven, became an effective evangelist, and led in the great revival in Samaria. On the desert road to Gaza he preached Christ to the treasurer of the powerful Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who became a convert. Saul of Tarsus was converted, and Barnabas with him took up the work of Antioch, begun by unnamed disciples. Many others, not particularly mentioned, contributed largely to the great work accomplished during these important years.

4. Places mentioned during this period

Jerusalem was central. Here occurred the closing events of Christ's earthly ministry, and here began the stirring scenes of the triumphs of the risen Christ. Here was that "upper chamber" where the disciples tarried in prayer until they were clothed

with power from on high. It was in this city, made sacred by a thousand memorable transactions, that the crowning event came in the descent of the Holy Spirit, to abide in the church throughout the gospel age. It was here that the marvelous manifestations of Pentecost took place and three thousand were added to the Lord in a single day. It was a Jerusalem prison which held the first Christian prisoners, and it was here the earth was stained with the blood of the martyrs, Stephen and James; and from here the church was scattered by persecution to go everywhere preaching the word.

Samaria was the scene of the first awakening outside of Jerusalem. "And there was great joy in that city." Lydda and Joppa were made memorable by Peter's visit to them as he "went throughout all parts." In the latter place the monks to-day profess to point out to travelers the house of "one Simon, a tanner, by the seaside," where Peter had the remarkable vision which made him ready to preach the gospel to a Gentile centurion at Cæsarea.

With the conversion of Saul of Tarsus we are given a glimpse of Damascus, "The Head of Syria," and "The Eye of the East," and a little later we see Antioch, destined to play a very important part in the succeeding period.

5. A time of beginnings

It is very difficult for us, after so many centuries of Christian development, to appreciate the

position of those early disciples. Everything was new. They had no Christian history to guide them. There were no Christian institutions and organizations, no formulated creeds, and no approved methods. They were at the beginning of a most remarkable movement, and very imperfectly understood the purpose and possibilities of the church of God. They had received a great commission and great promises, and in the coming of the Holy Spirit a great gift of power had been bestowed; and so they entered upon the most important work ever committed to men, and saw, as they went forward, most significant beginnings.

There was the descent of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of his work of power in the church.

There was the beginning of the larger views of truth. The old materialistic, Jewish conception of the kingdom gave way to the truer and more inspiring spiritual view.

There was the beginning of church order and organization. Whatever view may be held as to the existence of the church before the day of Pentecost, all must agree that at that time it began what may be termed an organic, self-conscious existence. After that event there was the continuing "steadfast in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in breaking of bread and the prayers" (2 : 42). We must not think of the Jerusalem church as being fully organized and officered at first, but under the leadership of the Holy Spirit church life and order were

begun and took on special forms as occasion demanded.

There was the beginning of the conflict with Judaism. At first the Christians attended the temple worship and mingled freely with their Jewish brethren, but soon the essential lines of cleavage began to appear, opposition and persecution arose, and Christianity came out more and more into its own independent position. It was so radically different from Judaism that the severance had to take place.

There was also the beginning of the larger conception of brotherhood and duty. It required a vision from heaven to convince Peter that he should preach the gospel to the Gentile Cornelius, and those with him. The church hesitated at first to indorse what Peter had done, but concluded, after a full hearing of the matter, that "to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11 : 18). At first they very imperfectly grasped the magnitude of this truth. But the door had begun to open and no man could shut it.



Quiz

What time is embraced in this period of study? Divisions and their characteristics? Who were the rulers at this time? What persons in the church were especially prominent? What place was central in the work? What city outside of Jerusalem first

received the gospel? What beginnings marked this period?

Suggested Topics

The Roman world at this time.

Jewish customs in reference to Gentiles.

The life of Herod Agrippa I.

Closing events in life of Pilate.

CHAPTER II

THE PROMISE OF THE FATHER

THE ascension of Jesus was preceded by a meeting with his disciples at Jerusalem at which “ he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father which, said he, ye heard from me.” And then to make plain to what promise he referred, he added: “ For John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence ” (Acts I : 4, 5). The promise then for which they were to wait was the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In order to make the matter still more explicit and to give definiteness to their expectations he said: “ Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you : and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth ” (Acts I : 8). These are the last recorded words of Christ, and are profoundly significant as bearing upon the mission of the church.

1. The central work of the church

“ Ye shall be my witnesses.” Luke 24 : 25-49 should be carefully read in this connection. “ Then opened he their mind that they might understand

the scriptures; and he said unto them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Ye are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send forth the promise of my Father upon you, but tarry ye in the city until ye be clothed with power from on high." It is made very plain that the central and supreme work of the church is that of witnessing. We are to testify to facts rather than philosophize and speculate about doctrines and theories. We are to tell what we know rather than what we guess. Peter and John, when commanded not to teach any more in the name of Christ, exclaimed: "We can not but speak the things which we saw and heard." It is not merely witnesses but "my witnesses." Christ must be central in our testimony. We must present his teachings, his character, his sacrifice, his resurrection, his power on earth to forgive sins, and his divinity. Paul understood the philosophies of his time, and saw clearly the need of social and political reforms, and yet he wrote: "Far be it from me to glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6 : 14). Any religious organization or movement that belittles the place of Christ is unfaithful to the supreme work of the church, and in the end must fail in any real benefit to humanity. "Christ is the end, for Christ is the beginning."

2. The extent of the work called for

“In Jerusalem, and all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth.” This thought, implanted in the minds of the apostles, was a most extraordinary one. It rose above all national boundaries and race distinctions, and took in the entire world: “Make disciples of all the nations.” It was the largest and most revolutionary conception that man had ever entertained. The world was steeped in class prejudice, national hostility, and race hatred. But here was a little company being filled with the idea that they had a mission and a message to all peoples without any exceptions. “He made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17 : 24). All were involved in the same sin and condemnation, and all needed the same Saviour.

3. The plan of this work

It was to be systematic and orderly. The Great Commission (Matt. 28 : 19, 20) takes a general view of the work as a whole, and says: “Make disciples of all the nations.” But in the final instructions divisions in the work are suggested. They were to be witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth. The work is one, the power one, the message one, and the needs of the world one; but the field is so vast and so diversified that there must be divisions in prosecuting the work. It may be pressing the

thought a little too far, but many have called attention to the fact that we have here suggested the great departments into which the work has been divided. Jerusalem suggests city missions, a work which in our day is taking on immense proportions; Judea and Samaria speak of State, Provincial, and home missions, while "the uttermost part of the earth" takes us out into the great work of foreign missions.

Another thought needs emphasizing at this point: One department of this work should not take precedence over another or be regarded as more fundamental than another. Intelligently and faithfully, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the church should seek to accomplish the whole work. The work in Judea and Samaria was not to wait till the completion of the work in Jerusalem. Nor were Judea and Samaria to be fully evangelized before there should be a reaching out to "the uttermost part of the earth." The responsibility of the church has to do with the entire field.

4. Equipment for the work

It was an undertaking of stupendous magnitude. That little band of disciples was utterly unable to do this work of themselves. Hence the promise: "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you."

It is of the utmost importance that we have clear thinking upon this subject of the Holy Spirit.

There are a few simple underlying principles which stand out clearly in connection with the beginnings which we are now studying.

(1) The baptism of the Holy Spirit was his coming to abide with the church. Says Dr. A. J. Gordon: "The upper room became the Spirit's baptistery, if we may use the figure. His presence 'filled all the house where they were sitting; . . . and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.' The baptistery would never need to be refilled, for Pentecost was once and for all, and the Spirit then came to abide in the church perpetually." What we need is not a baptism of the Spirit for that has been given, but a yielding of ourselves to the Spirit for the work he has come to perform. Rev. Ernest Boys makes this very pertinent declaration: "Being filled with the Spirit is not our having 'more of the Spirit,' but rather the Spirit having more of us."

(2) This coming of the Spirit to abide in the church was for a definite purpose. He came to give power for the work of witnessing. This was the beginning of the gospel age—an age of glad tidings, a time for telling the wonderful truth concerning Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit came to equip the church for this work. He had wrought in the world from the first, but now the period of preparation was past, and he came as the abiding superintendent of the work of spreading the gospel throughout the entire world.

(3) Observe further that the Holy Spirit works

in and through God's people. "Ye shall receive power." There were some external manifestations on the day of Pentecost, but these were purely incidental. The power was in the disciples themselves. It was not some strange, magical power, but power to testify. Knowledge and moral courage are the two things particularly needed to make a good witness. Jesus said: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all truth" (John 16 : 13), and also, "He shall bear witness of me" (John 15 : 26). Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost showed a wonderful enlargement of vision and grasp of truth. The Holy Spirit had opened his understanding. Then too, observe his marvelous transformation in courage. The cowardly denier of his Lord had become the absolutely fearless preacher of the gospel. What he saw and believed he dared tell. He was clothed with power from on high for the supreme work of witnessing. The Holy Spirit is here for this specific work. We have no right to ask for or expect the Spirit's power unless we are ready to do the work of witnessing. He is to help us to have knowledge and courage to speak of Jesus Christ. "Make disciples of all the nations . . . and lo, I am with you."



Quiz

For what were the apostles to tarry in Jerusalem? What is the supreme work of the church? Was

there anything surprising in the extent of the work proposed? Why are divisions of the work of world evangelism necessary? What are the departments of this work? Should the entire work be undertaken at the same time? What is the work of the Holy Spirit during this dispensation? How may we have the power of the Spirit?

Suggested Topics

The unity of humanity.

The work of the Holy Spirit during the old dispensation.

Are we to pray for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, or did it occur once for all on the day of Pentecost?

The day of the week on which Pentecost fell at this time.

CHAPTER III

THE INAUGURATION OF THE WORK

THE day of Pentecost marked the inauguration of the most significant movement of the ages. Long centuries of preparation culminated on that day. Christ's ministry, teaching, and sacrifice had looked forward to it. The Holy Spirit with power from on high had been promised by the risen Christ. The supreme work of the church had been set forth, and then Christ ascended to glory, and the disciples waited. Heaven waited too. Everything was prepared, and the inauguration day was fast approaching. It was peculiarly fitting that the great work of the church should begin on the day of Pentecost. It was known as the "day of First Fruits" (Num. 28 : 26), and "the feast of Harvest" (Exod. 23 : 16). It stood midway between the sowing and preparation of spring-time and the ingathering of autumn. And so "when the day of Pentecost was now come" (Acts 2 : 1), the Holy Spirit descended with power and the church entered upon its great mission of making Christ known to a lost world. Several features of this day call for consideration.

1. Those present at Jerusalem

This feast, coming in the summer-time, was the most largely attended of any of the feasts of the

year. "From a census taken in the time of Nero, more than two million seven hundred thousand were gathered at the Passover, and still greater numbers came to Pentecost." And since the Jews were scattered everywhere throughout the civilized world, these came from all quarters. Hence we are not surprised that Luke declares: "Now there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2 : 5), and that then he goes on to enumerate at least fifteen different and widely separated cities and countries which had representatives at this feast. They little realized when they came up to this "feast of Harvest" that it would mark the beginning of the harvest work of the church of God, and that many of them would return to their homes rejoicing in the salvation of Jesus Christ.

2. The coming of the Holy Spirit

They had been waiting for ten days, and yet "suddenly" to these expectant souls there came the manifestations of the Spirit's presence. The symbolism under which he came is peculiarly significant: wind and fire. Pervasiveness and flame were his.

(1) There was first of all "a sound from heaven as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting" (Acts 2 : 2). This sound was from heaven. They had seen Christ ascend and now they heard the descent of the

Spirit. This comparison to the wind suggests several interesting features.

a. It speaks of the mystery of the operations of the Spirit. Christ said to Nicodemus: "The wind bloweth where it willeth and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh and whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3 : 8).

b. Power is also suggested. It was as "the rushing of a mighty wind." The power of a tornado is irresistible. The promise in connection with the coming of the Spirit was the gift of power. Instinctively they must have realized that the "power from on high" had come.

c. Then too, there is emphasized the all-embracing, pervasive presence of the Spirit. All the house where they were sitting was filled. There was a presence as pure, as vital, as unseen, and yet as real as that of the very air they breathed. The Spirit had come to fill the church, and fill believers, yea, to fill the world with his presence and power.

(2) Then there was the symbolism of fire: "There appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them" (Acts 2 : 3). Two things are especially to be noted here:

a. The form was that of tongues. The ordinary Greek word for the instrument of speech is here used. The Holy Spirit had been promised to give power for witnessing. The Lord said to Moses

when he hesitated to obey the call to go to Egypt, and protested that he was “slow of speech”: “I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt speak” (Exod. 4 : 12). So now this tongue like as of fire sitting upon each one of them was the assurance of the Holy Spirit’s presence with them to enable them to give the message of God to the people.

b. They were tongues like as of fire. The word came to Moses out of a burning bush. Tongues of fire are needed to proclaim the truth of the gospel. It is said of Rowland Hill that “his words flowed hissing hot from his heart.” The Holy Spirit’s presence means zeal and energy, light and warmth. Coldness and formality are utterly foreign to the work of testifying for the Lord Jesus.

3. The immediate effect upon the church

“They were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2 : 4). This evidently included the entire one hundred and twenty mentioned in the preceding chapter. Whenever the Holy Spirit is thus present filling his people, important results are sure to follow. What these results will be depends upon existing conditions and needs. On this occasion there were two marked evidences in the church of the Spirit’s presence.

(1) “They all began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2 : 4). They did not speak in some strange gibberish that

nobody could understand. But they spoke in the languages of those who were present, so that these peoples from all quarters were amazed and exclaimed: "We hear them speaking in our tongues the mighty works of God" (Acts 2 : 11). This was not a promise of a continuous miracle of this character in the spread of the gospel, for it did not continue even in apostolic times, but it was rather a proclamation and a prophecy; a proclamation that the gospel was for all nations and tongues, and a prophecy that it should be preached in all the languages of the earth. It was eminently fitting that just such a manifestation should occur at the beginning of the work.

(2) "Then Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and spake forth unto them" (Acts 2 : 14). The miraculous manifestations ceased, the speaking with other tongues subsided, and the permanent work of witnessing began. A brief outline of Peter's sermon must suffice.

As preliminary or introductory he earnestly denied the charge of drunkenness made against them (Acts 2 : 15), and then explained in general that what they saw that day was the fulfilment of the wonderful prophecy of Joel (Acts 2 : 16-21). Having thus prepared the way, he proceeded to prove to them that Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had crucified had been exalted of God as both Lord and Christ or Messiah (Acts 2 : 36). In establishing this he urged three lines of proof. *a.* "The

mighty works and wonders and signs ” which had been wrought by Jesus and with which they were perfectly familiar (Acts 2 : 22). *b.* The resurrection of Christ from the dead. This was in accordance with prophecy (Acts 2 : 25-31), and was further established by the testimony of Peter and his associates who had seen the risen Lord (Acts 2 : 32). And *c.* the exaltation of Christ resulting in the “pouring forth of this which ye see and hear ” (Acts 2 : 33).

And through all the argument there ran the thought: This is the person whom “ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay ” (Acts 2 : 23). It was a masterly argument peculiarly calculated to convince the intellect and lay hold upon the conscience of those who heard.

4. The effect upon the multitudes

The last evening that Jesus was with his disciples he said, speaking of the Comforter: “If I go I will send him unto you, and he, when he is come ” that is *unto you*, “will convict the world in respect of sin and of righteousness and of judgment ” (John 16 : 7, 8). He came unto his disciples in fulfilment of this promise, on the day of Pentecost. We have seen the result upon them; now note the effect upon the multitudes. “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2 : 37). Peter told them

what to do and presented the forgiving mercy of God, and three thousand accepted the message of mercy and were baptized. And thus closed this wonderful day which marked the inauguration of the work of the church.



Quiz

Why was the day of Pentecost a specially fitting time for the inauguration of the work of the church? Who were present at this feast? What two things symbolized the coming of the Holy Spirit? In what ways were these peculiarly suitable? What significance attaches to the disciples' speaking with other tongues? What charge was made against them? How did Peter reply to this charge? What may be regarded as the topic of Peter's sermon? What three lines of argument did he urge? What had Christ said the Holy Spirit would do? What followed Peter's sermon?

Suggested Topics

The feast of Pentecost.

The Jews, at this time, outside of Palestine.

The Bible and the languages of the world.

The Holy Spirit's work of convicting.

CHAPTER IV

GROWTH DURING THIS PERIOD

THE growth of Christianity may be regarded as either external or internal. The one has to do with numbers, territory, and influence; the other with life and doctrine, organization and worship. The latter will come up for subsequent study, the former will now receive our attention.

1. Growth in numbers

Christ made many disciples during his ministry. How many of these, outside of Jerusalem, remained faithful after the crucifixion we have no means of knowing. There must, however, have been a large number; and these doubtless greatly aided in the spread of the gospel later when work began to be prosecuted outside of the city. The company which came together in Jerusalem and waited for the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit numbered "about a hundred and twenty" (Acts 1 : 15). On the day of Pentecost three thousand were added to these (Acts 2 : 41). The work went on "and the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved" (Acts 2 : 47). A little later we read: "But many of them that heard believed the word, and the number of the men came to be about

five thousand" (Acts 4 : 4). This count did not include the women, and probably was in addition to the three thousand already mentioned. Still the work grew: "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5 : 14). Each new convert seems to have become an active propagator of the faith: "And the word of God increased and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6 : 7). There seems to have been no abatement in the work, and again we read that the church "was multiplied" (Acts 9 : 31), and finally it is declared: "The word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12 : 24). This record is full of interest. These numbers are given in no way to exalt man, but to magnify the truth and to glorify God. It is worthy of note that the numbers began with additions, but the work increased so rapidly that they soon passed over into multiplications.

It is readily seen from these statements that at the end of this twelve-year period the number of Christians must have reached far up into the thousands. But, of course, anything like even an approximate estimate of the total is impossible.

2. The extent of this growth

Until after the death of Stephen in A. D. 37 the growth of the church was confined almost wholly

to Jerusalem. The thousands and the multitudes mentioned in the foregoing passages were practically all in that city. Some undoubtedly were there only temporarily to attend the feast, and soon returned to their homes, and became witnesses for Christ wherever they went. No direct mention, however, is made of such work. But following the scattering of the church by the persecution which arose upon the death of Stephen many outlying localities were reached with the gospel. There was a gracious revival in Samaria, and many accepted the message brought to them by Philip (Acts 8 : 5-13). Peter and John, in addition to the work done by Philip, "preached the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans" (Acts 8 : 25).

After the persecution ceased we are given a hint of how much the work had enlarged in the statement: "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, was multiplied" (Acts 9 : 31). About this time, for the purpose evidently of instructing and helping, in every way possible, the disciples, Peter went "throughout all parts," and came to Lydda and Joppa, where he found believers and many more were made (Acts 9 : 32-43).

Work had been done at Damascus also, and Christians had become so numerous in that city that Saul of Tarsus thought it worth while to go there with letters of authority from the high priest

in order that he might arrest them and bring them bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9 : 2). We also read of some who went "as far as Phœnicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word," and at the last-named place "the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number that believed turned unto the Lord" (Acts 10 : 19-21). Undoubtedly in many other places, not mentioned by name, the gospel was preached during this period and converts were made.

3. Growth in influence

The church, as represented by the little company in the upper room, attracted no attention. No one was drawn to it, and no one thought it of sufficient importance to oppose it. The throngs, swept on by the currents of life on every side, were all unmindful of the prayers and expectations of that devoted band.

During Christ's public ministry it was asked with a sneer by some of the leaders: "Hath any of the rulers believed on him or of the Pharisees?" So now nobody cared for these humble followers of a crucified Leader. But soon a great change took place. All classes were reached. Men of wealth, like Barnabas of Cyprus, sold their possessions "and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4 : 36). Nothing, perhaps, could show the growing influence of the gospel more strikingly than the statement that "a great company

of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6 : 7). This meant that strong prejudices, selfish interests, and pride of position were overcome, and that many of those most difficult of access were reached and conquered by the truth.

The growing influence of the church was seen also in the enemies it made and the opposition it encountered. A movement of no influence awakens no opposition. For the first six or seven years of his work in Burma Judson did not find it necessary to attempt to secure the favor of the king. His work seemed so unimportant that no one thought it worth while to oppose it. Thus it was with the church at first, but soon it began to grow, and its influence was felt and strong enemies arose. Listen to the roll call of dignitaries who assembled to pass judgment upon the apostles and stop their work: "Their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; Annas, the high priest was there, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest" (Acts 4 : 5, 6). Surely this was an array of enemies which spoke much for the growing power of the church.

Still another index of the growing influence of Christianity was the attitude of the multitudes of the people. Evidently the whole city was favorably impressed by what was being done. Speaking of the work wrought by the apostles following the judgment of God upon Ananias and Sapphira, it is

declared: "Howbeit, the people magnified them" (Acts 5 : 13). Before this the Sanhedrin would gladly have condemned Peter and John, but "they threatened them and let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people" (Acts 4 : 21). There was murder in their hearts (Acts 5 : 33) and they would undoubtedly have condemned these men to death had it not been for their fear of the people. Later, when they sent officers to arrest the apostles and bring them for trial again, "they brought them, but without violence, for they feared the people lest they should be stoned" (Acts 5 : 26).

Thus, from different quarters we find the evidence of the increasing power of the early church. It was an institution full of the forces of life, and it at once entered upon a period of remarkable, even marvelous, growth.



Quiz

State the two ways in which the growth of the church may be regarded. Which do we consider in this lesson? How many were converted on the day of Pentecost? What was the subsequent increase? How many Christians were there at the end of this period? To what place was the growth restricted preceding the death of Stephen? What place was next reached? What evidence that Galilee had the gospel? What other places are mentioned? What

influence had the church at first? State four evidences of the increasing influence of the church.

Suggested Topics

The matter of counting converts.

Church statistics.

The factors which contributed to the growth of the early church.

Lay-preaching.

CHAPTER V

CONDITIONS WITHIN THE CHURCH

WHILE there is much of interest in the outward growth of the church during this period, the conditions within the church itself are still more interesting.

The church did not spring into being fully organized. It did not begin with creeds and rules and regulations already made. It began as a living organism, and developed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It took on the various aspects of church life and order as occasion demanded.

1. Unity and brotherhood

One of the most striking features of the life of the Jerusalem church was its beautiful spirit of unity. "When the day of Pentecost was now come they were all together in one place" (Acts 2 : 1). And before this, during the days in the upper room, it is declared: "These all with one accord continued steadfastly in prayer, with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1 : 14). Increasing numbers did not seem to interfere with this spirit of unity, for when thousands had been gathered in we read: "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul"

(Acts 4 : 32). No wonder that it was a church of power and that multitudes were converted. This spirit of brotherhood led to a temporary communism in Jerusalem. "All that believed were together and had all things common. And they sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all according as any man had need" (Acts 2 : 44, 45). "And not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common" (Acts 4 : 32).

It is well carefully to note the principle involved in this communism, and the application made of it by these early Christians. The principle is a permanent one, and may be stated as follows: The Christian should hold all that he has subject to the calls of Christ, and the needs of his church. He should not say that aught of the things which he possesses is his own. He is simply a steward to use all for the glory of God.

The Jerusalem church, in applying this principle, adopted a community of goods. This seems to have been exceptional, as there is no intimation in the book of Acts or in the Epistles that any church outside of Jerusalem pursued a similar course. It seems too, to have been a purely voluntary matter, for Peter said to Ananias: "While it remained, did it not remain thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thy power?" (Acts 5 : 4)

There were at this time in Jerusalem exceptional conditions. Many of the converts were from outside

of the city, and disciples were multiplied very rapidly. It was desirable that all should remain in Jerusalem for a time in order to become established in the new faith. Hundreds had to be cared for, and in the warmth of Christian zeal and the impulse of the new spirit of brotherhood they gladly held all things in common and distributed to every one as he had need. In considering this phase of life in the Jerusalem church some have insisted that a mistake was made. But we should hesitate to make such a statement, since the course pursued seems to have had the full indorsement of the apostles and to have been adopted by a church filled with the Holy Spirit. It was a most striking method for setting in clear light the fundamental principle in the Christian life.

2. Church government

While very little is said during this period in reference to church organization, still it is not difficult to discover certain principles which are far-reaching in their import. Christ had said: "Be not ye called rabbi, for one is your teacher and all ye are brethren. . . Neither be ye called masters, for one is your master, even the Christ" (Matt. 23 : 8, 10). The apostles recognized this unity and equality of believers from the very first, and exercised no authority over the church. When the matter of a successor to Judas came up it was in the entire assembly of one hundred and twenty, and

Peter simply stated the case and “they,” the entire company, “put forward two” (Acts 1 : 15, 23), from whom the selection was made by lot. Peter and the other apostles assumed no prerogatives in this matter.

When it became necessary to select some who should be specially charged with the distribution of funds in caring for the needy, “the twelve called the multitude of disciples unto them” (Acts 6 : 2) and urged them to select seven men to attend to this business, and they chose the men whom they thought suitable. And the apostles prayed for them and laid their hands upon them. We have here a clear recognition on the part of the apostles of the authority of the church to select its own servants. The appointment of these seven men has been regarded by many as the beginning of the diaconate. But it must be noted that they are neither here nor elsewhere spoken of as deacons. Two of them, Stephen and Philip, were soon afterward preaching the word with power. Of the subsequent career of the others we know nothing. They were appointed for a special work which arose out of temporary conditions, and their appointment not only foreshadowed the diaconate, but the pastorate also; that is, when the church reached a place where it needed specially appointed servants or officers, it had the authority to appoint them. And a little later when it had become so established as to need both pastors and deacons as permanent officers it was competent to

choose them and set them apart for their work. The appointing power was in the church.

Another question arises: Was the church one organic body, embracing all believers, or were there many churches, each in a measure independent of the others? In Acts 9 : 31 we read: "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace." The best authorities are agreed that we should read "church" here instead of "churches" as in the old version. But the word "church" is used elsewhere in a general sense without reference to organization or local habitation. (Note, for example, Phil 3 : 6; Eph. 1 : 22, 23; Heb. 12 : 23.) Some have urged that there was at this time only the one church but scattered throughout Galilee, Samaria, and Judea. But this will not do. For we learn elsewhere that at the same time that this general term "church" was employed local churches were in existence. In writing of his first visit to Jerusalem, which occurred at the very time above referred to, when the church was enjoying peace, Paul says: "And I was still unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ" (Gal. 1 : 22). This plainly implies that as the gospel had spread throughout Judea, churches had been organized. And doubtless the same thing had taken place in Samaria and Galilee. A little later we have abundant evidence that wherever Paul went he established churches. It is reasonable to suppose that these local separate churches were con-

stituted upon the general plan of the Jerusalem church, in which the fundamental principles were the headship of Jesus Christ and the unity and equality of the brethren.

3. The worship of the church

For a time the Christians continued in the temple worship. They continued steadfastly “with one accord in the temple” (Acts 2 : 36). “Peter and John were going up into the temple at the hour of prayer” (Acts 3 : 1). How fully they entered into the temple service we are unable to say. But they must from the first have viewed the sacrifices and ceremonials in a new light. Redemption was in Christ and not in these. Aside from the temple worship “they continued in breaking bread at home” and “in the prayers.” There was a distinctively Christian worship from the first. The following features of worship were apparent.

(1) There was no bondage to place. In the upper room, at their homes, wherever there were devout hearts there was a place of worship.

(2) Spirit and not form was the essential thing. There was manifestly no ritual and there were no prescribed forms, but the expressions of faith and love were of the most simple and direct character.

(3) Prayer was central in their worship. Before the day of Pentecost the disciples were together for prayer. After that memorable day they continued steadfastly “in the prayers” (Acts 2 : 42). When

persecution arose they met in prayer and continued until the place where they were assembled was shaken. It was in a prayer meeting in the home of Mary, the mother of Mark, that Peter found the church gathered when he was miraculously delivered from prison (Acts 12 : 12). A constant danger to the church to-day is that too small a place is given to prayer.

(4) The social element in worship was recognized. We catch a glimpse of private devotion in the case of Peter on the housetop at the home of Simon, the tanner, in Joppa. There must always be much private worship if the church is to be strong. But there must also be the gathering together for worship. “And they”—the body of believers—“continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2 : 42). They came together to be taught and to enjoy a blessed fellowship with each other and with Jesus Christ in the simple service of the Lord’s Supper. Their worship throughout was marked by a beautiful simplicity, freedom, sincerity, and spirituality.



Quiz

Viewed as an organization, how did the church begin? What is said of the unity of the early church? What principle was involved in the communism of the church? Why did the church adopt communism? Was a mistake made? Was it an

example for other churches? In what ways did the apostles recognize the authority of the church? Were the seven chosen by the church, deacons? What evidence is there that local churches were organized outside of Jerusalem? Why did the Christians continue in the temple worship? What were the essentials of the worship of the early church?

Suggested Topics

Christian socialism.

Ritualism in worship.

Different uses of the word “church” in the New Testament.

The essentials in Christian unity.

CHAPTER VI

THE ORDINANCES

WE ARE in the habit of speaking of baptism and the Lord's Supper as the ordinances of the church. It may be well to call attention to the fact that they are never so designated in the Scriptures. 1 Cor. 11 : 2, "And keep the ordinances as I delivered them unto you," has sometimes been quoted as referring to baptism and the Lord's Supper. But the word here rendered ordinances is correctly translated traditions in the Revised version.

Since, however, the word ordinance in the Old Testament frequently refers to statutes dealing with forms and ritual observances, it may not inappropriately be used to designate the rites connected with the church of the New Testament. It is far better than the word *sacrament*, which is not a biblical word at all, and which by wrong usage and teaching has come to associate with baptism and the Lord's Supper views of grace and of ecclesiastical authority which are utterly foreign to the plain and simple teachings of the New Testament.

1. Baptism during this early period

The apostles were fresh from the instruction of Jesus, and eager to carry out his commands. Cen-

tral in the Great Commission (Matt. 28 : 19, 20) which he had given them was the command to baptize those who became disciples. Hence, we are not surprised on the day of Pentecost when the hearers “ were pricked in their heart ” and cried “ Brethren, what shall we do? ” that Peter promptly replied: “ Repent ye, and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit ” (Acts 2 : 38).

While there are not many allusions to baptism during the period which we are now studying, still there are sufficient to make clear the practices of the apostles and others during this time. The following conclusions are manifestly deducible from these early narratives :

(1) A personal acceptance of Christ preceded baptism.

Peter urged the convicted multitude to repent first and then be baptized. And then we read: “ They, then, that received his word were baptized ” (Acts 2 : 41). The next mention of baptism is in connection with the work in Samaria: “ When they believed Philip preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ they were baptized, both men and women ” (Acts 8 : 12). The eunuch accepted the message preached to him by Philip, and then said: “ Behold, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized? ” (Acts 8 : 36). Cornelius and those with

him heard the gospel from Peter and received the gift of the Holy Spirit and were then baptized (Acts 10 : 46-48). And Saul of Tarsus fully surrendered all to Christ and then “he arose and was baptized” (Acts 9 : 18).

(2) Infant baptism was unknown during this period.

Many learned authorities could be quoted in confirmation of this statement, but we are now concerned particularly with the Scripture narrative. Had infant baptism been practised during this time there certainly would have been some allusion to it. This was a time of beginnings and foundation laying, and a matter of such fundamental import as infant baptism would not have escaped mention had later ideas then prevailed. While we must reason cautiously from the silences of Scripture, yet sometimes these silences are very suggestive. In the case of those baptized in Samaria it is stated that they were “both men and women” (Acts 8 : 12). Surely the failure to speak of infants here—for there must have been many of them in Samaria—is profoundly significant. It is true that on the day of Pentecost Peter declared: “To you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off” (Acts 2 : 39). It does not read: “To your little ones,” but “to your children,” meaning, as the word does very frequently in the plural—descendants. (See Matt. 3 : 9; Rom. 9 : 7; Gal. 4 : 31.) Peter had in mind the scope of Christ’s

parting words and said in substance: "The promise is for the Jews, for you who hear, and for all your descendants, and not for you only, but also for all the nations who are afar off." It is too bad to mar such a passage with the baptismal controversy.

(3) Baptism followed very promptly the acceptance of Christ.

Those converted in the day of Pentecost were baptized at once. The Ethiopian received the message as he rode in his chariot and stopped and was baptized in a wayside pool. Ananias said to Saul of Tarsus: "Why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized" (Acts 22 : 16). It is quite possible that with Christianity established and popular, we need to exercise more caution lest unsaved persons come into the church, but we would conform more nearly to New Testament practices if conversion and baptism were brought closer together than is customary.

(4) Baptism was closely associated with the remission of sins.

On the day of Pentecost Peter said to those who wanted to know what to do: "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2 : 38). And Ananias said to Saul of Tarsus: "Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22 : 16). From these passages some have practised "baptism for the remission of sins,"

insisting that baptism is essential to salvation. But note carefully three facts: *a.* Salvation was presented as wholly of Christ. “And in none other is there salvation; for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved” (Acts 4 : 12). Again, Peter stated the matter very clearly in the house of Cornelius: “In his name every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10 : 43). And at once when they believed and before they were baptized the Holy Spirit fell upon them. It is impossible to believe that the Holy Spirit was bestowed before they were forgiven. *b.* Baptism was evidently then as it is now, especially in heathen lands, a peculiar test and confession of faith in Christ. To refuse to be baptized was an evidence of lack of saving faith, hence this ordinance was very closely associated with the blessings obtained through faith in Christ. *c.* No careful separation was made between the symbol and the thing symbolized. “The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1 : 7). The cleansing is wholly of Christ, but the baptism is the striking symbol of that cleansing, hence the words of Ananias, “and wash away thy sins.” It is doubtless true that in our opposition to the wretched heresy of baptismal regeneration some among us have failed to give to this ordinance its New Testament place and emphasis.

(5) The act of baptism was immersion.

Since the word baptism is transferred from the

Greek rather than translated, and means immersion, as practically all Greek scholars are now agreed, it is not surprising that instances of baptism occur where no reference is made to the act further than is found in the word itself. If the word were translated we would read: "Then they that received his word were immersed," which would be explanation sufficient. But as if to guard against the possibility of mistake there is given a detailed account of one baptism. It is a word picture of the entire transaction: "Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And he commanded the chariot to stand still, and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip" (Acts 8 : 36-39).

The following arguments against immersion have been urged in connection with these early events: It has been insisted that there were no suitable places for immersion in the city of Jerusalem; and had there been, it has been claimed that three thousand could not have been immersed in a single day. It hardly needs to be stated at the present time that Jerusalem abounded in pools and baths and reservoirs which were admirably adapted to the purpose of immersion. The incident in Ongole, India, where six ministers—only two of them working at a time—baptized in nine hours two thousand two hundred and twenty-two, is very familiar, and

demonstrates how easily the three thousand could have been immersed on the day of Pentecost. It is also urged that the baptism of the Spirit on that day was, as Peter quotes from Joel, a pouring forth (Acts 2 : 17). Therefore the water baptism should be a pouring. But observe carefully the promise: "John, indeed, baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence" (Acts 1 : 5). They knew that John's baptism was an immersion, an enveloping in water, and it was now declared that they would soon "be baptized *in* the Holy Spirit." Note with care the fulfilment. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was "poured forth" until his presence, which was audibly recognized, "filled all the house where they were sitting" (Acts 2 : 2), and they were baptized in the Holy Spirit. Thus, the baptism of the Spirit, instead of being an argument against immersion, is strikingly conclusive in its favor.

2. The Lord's Supper

At the "Last Supper" in the upper room Christ instituted a special memorial service. He said: "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22 : 19). Two facts are to be particularly noted in connection with the instituting of this supper. (1) It was not a regular meal, but followed the eating of the Passover supper. This is apparent from the gospel narratives. And so when Paul speaks of it (1 Cor. 11 : 25) he says that "after supper" Christ took

the bread and the cup. This is important, as some have supposed that the early Christians identified the Lord's Supper with a common meal. (2) The second fact is the prominence given to the "breaking of bread" in the institution of the ordinance. (See Matt. 26 : 26; Mark 14 : 22; Luke 22 : 19.) This act is made so prominent that it is not surprising that this expression, "breaking of bread," came later to be a name for the service. (Acts 20 : 11; 1 Cor. 10 : 16; 11 : 24.) The events of that evening when Christ instituted the Supper were still fresh in the minds of the apostles when they entered upon the work of instructing the new-made converts. Of these we read: "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2 : 42). In reference to the "breaking of bread" undoubtedly Peter and his collaborators did what Paul declared he did: "But I received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you" (1 Cor. 11 : 23). This was a distinctively Christian service, and so while they participated in the temple worship they continued "breaking bread at home" (Acts 2 : 46). Had this been simply an ordinary meal at home such mention of it would have been wholly unnecessary. They were observing what the apostles had taught them. The place of this observance was naturally in their homes where Christian worship began. The frequency of this service is not indicated. But evidently from the first the Chris-

tians, instructed by the apostles, observed a simple memorial service called the “breaking of bread,” and later “The Lord’s Supper” (1 Cor. 11 : 20).



Quiz

What is said of the use of the words “ordinance” and “sacrament”?

What was Peter’s command to the multitude on the day of Pentecost?

What evidence is there that faith always preceded baptism?

What is the evidence that infant baptism was not practised at this time?

How promptly did baptism follow conversion?

Was baptism made a saving ordinance?

State the evidence that baptism was immersion.

What objections are raised? How are they met?

When and by whom was the Lord’s Supper instituted?

What reason for believing that this Supper was not a regular meal?

What evidence that it was observed from the first?

Suggested Topics

Present customs in observing the Lord’s Supper.

The extent to which immersion is now practised.

A brief history of infant baptism.

The Greek words for pour, sprinkle, and immerse.

What led to sprinkling and pouring for baptism?

CHAPTER VII

THE CONFLICT WITH JUDAISM

WITH the crucifixion of Jesus the Jews evidently thought that their trouble from that quarter was ended, so that they were entirely unprepared for the extraordinary outbreak on the day of Pentecost. At first the leaders seem to have been bewildered and to have made no attempt to oppose the work of the apostles, but this soon passed and they resorted to strenuous measures to prevent the spread of the gospel. The Sadducees seem to have led in this opposition, but as the entire Sanhedrin was soon involved the Pharisees must also have joined in. In fact, there were essentially the same spirit and agencies present that had brought about the condemnation and crucifixion of Jesus.

1. The first opposition

The healing of the lame man “at the door of the temple called Beautiful” (Acts 3 : 7, 8) must have occurred not long after the day of Pentecost. This notable miracle brought together throngs of people to whom Peter preached with great earnestness and directness, charging them and their rulers with killing the “Prince of Life” (Acts 3 : 14). These were bold words, calculated to stir the consciences

or the anger of those who heard them. The report was quickly taken to those in authority, and before Peter's sermon was done he and John were arrested. It is well to note carefully the statements made in this connection as they disclose the beginning of the opposition. "As they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being sore troubled because they taught the people, and proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4 : 1, 2).

There were two complaints against them:

(1) "They *taught* the people." These unlettered Galilean fishermen were setting themselves up to teach the people, and multitudes were thronging to hear them, and many were believing what they taught. This, of course, was regarded as the height of presumption, and as an affront to the regularly constituted leaders and teachers of the people.

(2) "They proclaimed in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." This doctrine was peculiarly hateful to the Sadducees, who did not believe in any resurrection of the dead, and as it was based upon the resurrection of Jesus, it was distasteful to the leaders among the Pharisees also.

Peter and John were arrested and put in prison until the next day when they were tried by what was evidently the Sanhedrin (Acts 4 : 5, 6). Peter made the most of the occasion by again fearlessly preaching Christ to them. The boldness of Peter and

John (Acts 4 : 13), the presence of the man who had been healed (Acts 4 : 14), and the attitude of the people (Acts 4 : 21) rendered the officials cautious, and they discharged Peter and John with the command that they speak and teach no more in the name of Jesus, threatening them with severe punishment should they disobey. They replied: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye; for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard" (Acts 4 : 19, 20).

2. The second outbreak of persecution

Regardless of the threats of the Jewish authorities the apostles went on with their work of teaching and preaching, and many converts were made. Ananias and Sapphira sought honor in the church through deceit and lying, and the summary judgment of God fell upon them. Following this there was a period of peculiar manifestation of the divine power. "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5 : 14), and the apostles, apparently all of them this time, were arrested. Observe the following facts in connection with this arrest.

(1) The public charge brought against the apostles was really violation of parole. "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name; and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching" (Acts 5 : 28). The apostles had refused to obey

their commands and recognize their authority, and so of course there was nothing for them to do but to arrest them.

(2) But there were at least two other causes for this arrest. "They were filled with jealousy" (Acts 5 : 17). The multitudes were following these new teachers, and what these Jewish leaders regarded as their rights and prerogatives were being utterly ignored. Then too, there was a grave side to the matter which was fraught with very serious possibilities: "Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us" (Acts 5 : 28). And so they proposed to stop this work if possible.

(3) The outcome. The apostles were thrown into prison, but an angel of God opened the prison doors and commanded them to go on with their work. Brought again before the Sanhedrin, Peter declared: "We must obey God rather than men." The spirit of murder was in the hearts of the persecutors, but they feared the people. Then the learned Gamaliel counseled them that if this work were not of God it would be overthrown, but if it were of God they could not overthrow it. Not daring to adopt the extreme measures to which their jealousy and hatred prompted them, they agreed with Gamaliel "and when they had called the apostles unto them they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus" (Acts 5 : 40). But again they went out disregarding the commands and threats of Jewish officials "and every day, in the

temple and at home, they ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus as the Christ."

3. The stoning of Stephen

The Gamaliel policy seems to have prevailed for several years, during which time there was a marked advance in the apprehension of the essential relation of the gospel to Jewish institutions. Stephen, one of the seven, "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6 : 5), became a preacher of profound insight into the truth and of great effectiveness as a speaker. "They were not able to withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he spake." He was arrested, made a masterly defense which so enraged his persecutors that they dragged him out of the city and stoned him. Two specific charges were made against Stephen (Acts 6 : 13). These were quite different from those made against the apostles some three or four years earlier.

(1) He was charged with speaking against "this holy place," the temple, and (2) against "the law" of Moses. Those who testified against him were "false witnesses." Undoubtedly the spirit and form of their testimony was false. He was not guilty of "blasphemous words," as charged, but unquestionably the Christians were more and more regarding the temple service and the Mosaic law from an entirely different point of view from that held by the Jews. Christ was the fulfilment of the sacrifices and of the law, and salvation was wholly in him.

The conceptions held were so radically different that the conflict at these points was inevitable, and Jews and Christians must separate. The stoning of Stephen was the outburst of a storm which had been long gathering.

4. Persecution following the death of Stephen

Stephen was stoned by a mob. The reason why the Roman authorities paid no attention to this, and also why the Jews were allowed to go on in such a high-handed way with their persecutions, was doubtless due to the fact that at this time Pilate had gone to Rome to answer charges against him. Caligula was just succeeding Tiberius upon the throne, and Judea was left for some time practically without any Roman ruler.

The stoning of Stephen was the beginning of a great persecution against the church at Jerusalem (Acts 8 : 1). There were several important features of this persecution.

(1) It had a vigorous leader. Saul of Tarsus was present at the death of Stephen. He imbibed the spirit of the occasion and at once threw himself into the work of persecution and "laid waste the church, entering into every house, and dragging men and women committed them to prison" (Acts 8 : 3).

(2) It aimed at the suppression of Christianity. Evidently Saul conceived the idea of carrying his work into surrounding cities and so to punish and

terrify Christians that this new movement would cease.

(3) The opposition was evidently against the essential teachings of the gospel. Saul set out to Damascus to find those of "The Way" (Acts 9 : 2). The gospel was "the way" that superseded the teaching of the temple and of the law, and filled the leaders of the Jews with unspeakable hatred and the spirit of determined opposition.

(4) Two things of profound importance resulted from this persecution. The church at Jerusalem was scattered (Acts 8 : 1) and Saul of Tarsus was converted (Acts 9 : 17, 18).

The persecutions by the Jews, instead of hindering the gospel, rather fired the disciples with increased zeal, brought out into clearer light the essential truths of Christianity, and scattered the disciples to become preachers of the faith wherever they went.



Quiz

What was the feeling of the Jews following the crucifixion of Jesus?

What was the occasion of the first outbreak of opposition?

What two complaints were made against Peter and John?

What was the outcome of this first trial?

Who were arrested at the second outbreak?

What were the causes of this trouble?

What counsel did Gamaliel give, and why was it accepted?

How much time elapsed before the third outbreak?

Who was Stephen?

What charges were brought against him?

State the leading features of the persecution following the stoning of Stephen.

What two very important events came out of this persecution?

Suggested Topics

The Sanhedrin.

The Jewish idea of salvation.

Sketch of Gamaliel's life.

Conditions and changes at Rome about this time.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BEGINNING OF ENLARGEMENT

DOUBTLESS many of those converted in Jerusalem returned to their homes, but not until after the martyrdom of Stephen is there a record of any work of preaching outside of Jerusalem. We then read: "They therefore that were scattered abroad went about preaching the word" (Acts 8 : 4). How far this work at first extended we may judge from the statement that "they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8 : 1).

In the eighth chapter of Acts two instances are cited where those not Jews were reached with the gospel, the one at Samaria, and the other "on the way that goeth down from Jerusalem to Gaza." In both instances it is interesting to note that the preacher was "one of the seven," and that he bore a Greek name, Philip; and later was known as "the evangelist" (Acts 21 : 8). He must not be confused with the apostle who had the same name.

1. The work of grace in Samaria

Christ preached in a city of Samaria and many of the Samaritans believed on him (John 4 : 39). And it was to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well

that he made the first recorded declaration of his Messiahship. He also said to his apostles that they should be his witnesses "in all Judea and Samaria." Thus, it seems to have been the purpose of Christ that Samaria should be the first place outside of Judea to receive the gospel. Since the Samaritans were a mixed people, having both Jewish and Gentile blood, it was fitting that they should be the first to whom the gospel should be preached as the church began to reach out in its larger mission.

Several features of this work in Samaria, viewed in its relation to this particular stage in the development of Christianity, call for consideration.

(1) The method of work.

It was very direct and simple. Philip "proclaimed unto them the Christ." This preaching of Christ was the first and central thing. All else was merely incidental. Demons were cast out, the palsied and lame were healed, and the people were attracted by these things; but it was the message which was brought to them that was vital. Hence we read: "When they believed Philip preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8 : 12). Philip did not place the emphasis upon the work of healing nor upon any mere temporal blessings, but he preached salvation through Jesus Christ. He was faithful to the supreme work of witnessing for Christ.

(2) The visit of Peter and John.

When word reached the apostles in Jerusalem of the work in Samaria they at once “sent unto them Peter and John.” The purpose of this action is not stated, but the fact that the two leading men of their number were selected is evidence that the mission was regarded as one of much importance. There doubtless was, in the minds of some, a question whether the gospel should be preached directly to the Samaritans. But they must have remembered the work of Jesus there, and his parting instructions to them. And so Peter and John must have gone with open minds to investigate the situation.

They found a genuine work of grace in progress, and “great joy in that city.” But there were some things requiring their attention. First of all, the Holy Spirit had not yet fallen upon the converts; therefore they prayed for them, laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8 : 15-17). It is probable, from statements elsewhere made, that this giving of the Holy Spirit in answer to the prayers of the apostles was accompanied with special miraculous manifestations (Acts 10 : 44-46; 19 : 6; 2 : 4). We naturally pause to ask, Are we warranted in looking for such manifestations at the present time? Two considerations have a very important bearing upon this inquiry.

a. Such manifestations seem to have been exceptional even in apostolic times. There is no evidence that the speaking with “other tongues” continued in the Jerusalem church after the day of Pentecost.

There was a special gift of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost—when the gospel was proclaimed to the Jews. There was another special gift when the gospel was preached to the Samaritans, and still another when Peter took the message to the Gentile Cornelius. There seems to have been a kind of initiative manifestation of the Spirit which subsided as the work went on, not that the work of the Spirit in any sense diminished, but the exceptional gave place to the normal and central work of giving power for witnessing.

b. The apostles had no official successors. They occupied a unique position in the inauguration of the work of the church. There is no intimation that the special gift of the Spirit issuing in miraculous works was ever bestowed by the laying-on of any but apostolic hands. They exercised a supervision over the churches and possessed authority which belonged to their peculiar position in relation to Christ and the inception of the work of the kingdom, and which from the very nature of the case could be transferred to no successors.

Another matter received the attention of the apostles. The church had received an unworthy man into its membership. Simon Magus, “half dupe and half impostor,” thought “to obtain the gift of God with money.” At Jerusalem the judgment of God upon Ananias and Sapphira was an awful warning against lying and hypocrisy in the church. So now at Samaria, at the beginning of the work there,

Peter's terrible rebuke of this man who would traffic in holy things was a perpetual warning against the sin of "Simony." The Lord looketh upon the heart and he wants in his church only such as have been renewed in the spirit of their minds.

2. The conversion of the Ethiopian

While this man was undoubtedly a Gentile, the fact that he had been to Jerusalem to worship, and that he was reading the prophecy of Isaiah, would indicate that he was a Jewish proselyte. In our study at this time we are not concerned with all the interesting details of this conversion, but with those features which bear more or less directly upon the work of the enlargement of Christianity.

(1) Special providential factors.

God had begotten in the heart of this Ethiopian a desire for better things. This had led him into the outer courts of Judaism. But he was not yet satisfied, and in the wonderful Messianic prophecies of Isaiah he was searching for still better things. God is at work in the hearts of those who are afar off, creating a longing for the truths of the gospel. Philip, the servant of Christ, left the work at Samaria, and under the guidance of the Spirit came, with the message of life, to this man. Those who are led by the Spirit will find open doors and prepared hearts.

(2) Personal work.

In Samaria Philip preached to the multitudes, but

here he taught one man. Jesus adopted both methods of work. Whenever the church has wrought with peculiar vigor and effectiveness it has given large place to the work of "individuals for individuals."

(3) Thoroughness characterized Philip's work.

He evidently taught this man with great faithfulness and then pressed the matter of immediate decision and action. He began with the passage in Isaiah which the man was reading and preached unto him Jesus. This preaching of Jesus included not only the necessity of belief in Christ, but also of confession in baptism, and that without delay. Too often our teaching is inadequate, and we fail too, in leading men to decision. Here were two men whose paths crossed once, and in all probability would never do so again. Philip appreciated the importance of thorough and decisive work, and the result was a man saved and sent on his way rejoicing. And more than that, this man was an influential representative of the powerful Candace, queen of the Ethiopians; and if we may trust the historian Eusebius, he became the founder of Christianity in Ethiopia and also in Arabia Felix.



Quiz

Was there any work done outside of Jerusalem before the martyrdom of Stephen? What took place immediately following that event? Who was

Philip? Who were the Samaritans? What feature of his work did Philip make prominent? Why did Peter and John visit Samaria? What resulted from the laying of their hands upon the converts? Why are we at the present time not warranted in looking for miraculous gifts in connection with the receiving of the Holy Spirit? Who was Simon Magus, and what is the sin of Simony? Why did Philip leave the work in Samaria? What were the providential factors in the conversion of the Ethiopian? In what way do workers often fail?

Suggested Topics

The Samaritans as a people.

Sorcery.

“Speaking with tongues.”

Was the Ethiopian a Negro?

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST GENTILE CONVERTS

THE first clearly defined instance of direct work for the Gentiles is the preaching by Peter to the Roman centurion Cornelius, together with "his kinsmen and near friends," at Cæsarea (Acts 10 : 1-48). It is probable that the Ethiopian to whom Philip preached was a Gentile, but also a Jewish proselyte. While the Samaritans were not regarded as Jews, neither were they looked upon as being Gentiles. In his statement, years afterward, at the Jerusalem conference, Peter evidently claimed that this case of Cornelius was the beginning of the work of the gospel among the Gentiles. He said: "Brethren, ye know that a good while ago God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe" (Acts 15 : 7).

This new departure was profoundly significant, and several features of it call for careful consideration.

1. All need the gospel

It is an interesting fact that this first Gentile to receive the gospel was one of the best rather than one of the worst. He was "a devout man and one

that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people” (Acts 10 : 1, 2). We can readily think of him as belonging to the best class of Romans. He had doubtless sought satisfaction in the Roman religion, and in Greek philosophy; and, with hunger of soul unsatisfied, he had turned to the God of the Jews. And yet this man needed the gospel; and if he needed it, how much greater is the need of the masses of the Gentile world? There are those to-day who insist that the heathen do not need the gospel. They have their own religions, customs, and ideals which, it is urged, are better adapted to their condition than anything our religion can bring to them. Therefore let them alone. But if Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, needed the gospel, there is nowhere upon the face of the earth a Gentile who does not need the same message of life.

2. An obstacle in the way

The command of Christ was to make disciples of all the nations. Some eight years had passed and nothing had yet been done to reach the Gentile world. The trouble was not in the gospel, for that was adapted to the needs of all. The difficulty was not in the Gentiles, for not a few of them, like Cornelius, were ready to receive the message, recognizing their need.

The hindrance was in the church itself. This has often been the case. Carey and his coworkers,

standing at the beginning of modern missions, met with opposition from the churches, on every side. So learned a man as Sydney Smith referred to their plans as: "The dreams of a dreamer who dreams he has been dreaming." To-day the greatest obstacles to the world's evangelization are within the churches themselves. Jewish narrowness and prejudice was the difficulty which stood in the way of the early church. While the Jews regarded it as unlawful to mingle socially and eat with the Gentiles, there was no express Mosaic command against this. But tradition and custom were so strong that the early Christians were very slow to grasp the truth of the essential equality of all men before God, and at first they evidently believed that while the gospel was for all men, they must become Jewish proselytes before becoming Christians. In Joppa, at the home of "one Simon a tanner," Peter had the extraordinary vision (Acts 10 : 9-16) which issued in the command of the Holy Spirit in reference to the messengers from Cornelius: "Go with them, nothing doubting, for I have sent them" (Acts 10 : 20). And Peter, rising above the teachings and prejudices of a lifetime, disregarding all possible censure and misunderstanding, was, like Saul of Tarsus, "not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts (26 : 19), but went and entered into the home of Cornelius and fearlessly and faithfully preached the glad tidings of salvation. A great forward step had been taken, the full significance of which would not

be understood until a new leader—Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles—should be raised up.

3. The first sermon to the Gentiles

We have the outline of Peter's sermon on this occasion (Acts 10 : 34-43). The introduction was conciliatory: "I perceive that God is no respecter of persons." This was a new revelation to Peter, and he undoubtedly uttered it with great emphasis. Then he sought a common ground: "Ye yourselves know" in a general way about Jesus Christ and his work. Having thus admirably prepared the way he at once plunged into the great theme.

(1) Jesus of Nazareth, anointed of God, went about doing good. Here is the wonderful sympathetic loving ministry of Jesus, and he added: "We saw all these things."

(2) "They slew him" (ver. 39). At Jerusalem he said: "Ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay." If it required courage for him to say "ye" at Jerusalem, it must have been even harder for him to say "*they*" at Cæsarea.

(3) "Him God raised up the third day" (ver. 40, 41). Even to us chosen witnesses he appeared. How this testimony of Peter must have moved and thrilled his hearers.

(4) "He is ordained of God to be the Judge of the living and of the dead" (ver. 42). All must stand before him to give an account of the deeds done in the body.

(5) “Through his name every one that believeth in him shall receive remission of sins” (ver. 4). The prophets were appealed to in confirmation and reinforcement of this glorious truth. It was a remarkable sermon, admirably adapted to meet the exigencies of a profoundly significant occasion.

4. The outcome of the meeting

“While Peter yet spake these words the Holy Spirit fell on all them that heard the word” (Acts 10 : 44). They heard the word—in the sense of accepting it. They received the message of life which Peter brought to them. And then as the Holy Spirit had fallen upon the Jews at first, so now he came upon the Gentiles, and in a striking manner set the seal of the divine approval upon this new departure in the work of the church. God not only authorized Peter by a special vision to do this work, but when the apostle had obeyed, he in a most unmistakable way endorsed what had been done. It would seem that ordinarily the special gift of the Spirit came after baptism, and through the laying on of the apostles’ hands (Acts 8 : 12, 17-19; 19 : 5-7). But in this case it came before baptism and without the laying on of hands. Possibly Peter and those Jews with him needed this special and immediate manifestation of the Spirit to convince them of the genuineness of the work and to lead them to see that no Jewish forms or rites were necessary in order to welcome these converts into the church. We may

also conclude that it is wise to be very careful how we set up prescribed rules and conditions for the operations of the Spirit of God.

Another question at once arose. Should these Gentile converts receive baptism just as the Jewish converts had? Or must they receive certain Jewish rites first? This discussion is not stated. It may have been simply in the minds of some. But Peter came forward and said: "Can any man forbid the water that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we; and he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 10 : 47, 48).

There is probably no allusion here to the "mode of baptism." Some have supposed that the language implies the bringing of water for the purpose of baptism. But surely no one could have objected to the bringing in of a small quantity of water. If there was any objection of this character it might have arisen in connection with the use of the public baths or reservoirs for immersion. This entire thought, however, seems to be foreign to the narrative. These persons had received the message of salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit; the water of baptism was, so to speak, waiting for them. Would any one refuse to them this ordinance?

5. A conference at Jerusalem

A report of what had taken place at Cæsarea soon reached Jerusalem, and Peter's return was

evidently anxiously awaited by “the apostles and the brethren.” As soon as he arrived he was given a hearing (Acts 11 : 1-18). The charge brought against him was: “Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised and didst eat with them.” This conference, it should be noted, did not take up the larger question of the relation of the Gentile converts to the Jewish law as was done some years later (Acts 15 : 1-29). The church was not yet ready for this question. Peter in no way denied or evaded the charge. But he proceeded to make two things very clear: first, his vision at Joppa, of which he gave a detailed account; and secondly, the fact of the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles to whom he preached. He concluded with these significant words: “If then God gave unto them the like gift as he did also unto us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I, that I could withstand God?” The opposition was silenced and they “glorified God, saying, Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life” (Acts 10 : 17, 18).



Quiz

Who was the first to preach the gospel to the Gentiles? When, where, and to whom was this done? What deduction may be drawn from the character of the first Gentile convert? What specially stood in the way of the conversion of the

Gentiles? What is the greatest hindrance to missions? How were Peter's prejudices overcome? Give an outline of Peter's sermon? What took place while Peter was yet speaking? What was the decision in reference to the baptism of these Gentile converts? Why was a conference held in Jerusalem at this time? How did Peter answer the charge brought against him? What was the result of his reply?

Suggested Topics

The centurions mentioned in the New Testament.
Cæsarea at this time.

How does the Holy Spirit speak to me?

Peter's character as seen in the first twelve chapters of Acts.

CHAPTER X

A NEW LEADER CALLED

THE forces of expansion in the church were working with increasing power. The time was rapidly approaching when these forces must be directed and utilized in carrying out the larger mission of the gospel. Jerusalem, saturated in Judaistic conceptions, could not continue to be the center of operations; and leaders must be found who would break away entirely from Jewish prejudices and legalism and recognize fully the universal character of Christianity. Saul of Tarsus was chosen of God to come to the front at this significant period.

1. His conversion

The first mention we have of him is in connection with the stoning of Stephen: "The witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul" (Acts 7 : 58 . . . "and Saul was consenting unto his death" (Acts 8 : 1). And a little later it is declared: "But Saul laid waste the church, entering into every house, and dragging men and women committed them to prison" (Acts 8 : 3). "And Saul yet breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9 : 1), set out for Damascus, the Syrian capital, to bind and

bring to Jerusalem all the Christians whom he could find. The journey must have taken nearly a week. The psalmist long before had said: "I thought on my ways, I turned my feet unto thy testimonies" (Ps. 150 : 59). Saul undoubtedly found time in this journey to think on his ways. Naturally there would be some reaction from the exciting scenes of persecution through which he had been passing. The tolerant teachings of Gamaliel may have filled his mind. And doubtless he saw again the transfigured face of the martyred Stephen and heard again his masterly defense, until he found himself in that state described by the words: "It is hard for thee to kick against the goad" (Acts 26 : 14). He had almost reached the city of Damascus when the crisis came, and in the midst of a light brighter than that of the midday sun he saw the Lord Jesus and heard his voice. And Saul the persecutor was conquered and cried: "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22 : 10) Three days of darkness and struggle followed, but the tide of his life turned that day on the Damascus road when the Lord Jesus met him.

This conversion is usually spoken of as exceptional and extraordinary, and most writers dwell upon its remarkable features. And yet the exceptional and miraculous in it may be regarded simply as the divine emphasis upon the essential features in every conversion. Note three things revealed in the words: "What shall I do, Lord?"

(1) There was conscious need. His pride was

humbled, his self-reliance was gone, and he was prostrated. The old foundations were swept away and he was filled with a sense of helplessness. Every conversion springs out of sense of need.

(2) There was faith in Christ. He was helpless, but not hopeless. He saw his wretched condition, but did not give way to despair. Something could be done, and the one whom he saw as central in that glorious light could give help. He saw himself in great need, but he saw Jesus, and so his cry: "What shall I do, Lord?" was one of faith and hope.

(3) And yet one thing more was submission to Christ. He had set out from Jerusalem with letters of authority from the high priest, but now he awaited orders from Jesus of Nazareth. Ever after he delighted to call himself the bond-servant of Christ. That day, near the city of Damascus, he found a Master worthy of his service, and he fully surrendered all to him. And the cry that sprang involuntarily to his lips "What shall I do, Lord?" became the watchword of his life.

Thus the conversion of Saul of Tarsus with its exceptional features became for him and for all others a marvelous setting forth of the essentials of all true conversion: A sense of need, faith in Christ, and submission to him.

2. His call to be the apostle to the Gentiles

When Ananias, "a disciple at Damascus," was told to go to the blind but praying Saul of Tarsus

it was with these words: "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9 : 15, 16). And he tells us himself that some years later, when he was in Jerusalem, he had a vision while he was praying in the temple and the Lord commanded him: "Depart: for I will send thee forth far hence unto the Gentiles" (Acts 22 : 21). Thus his call was made unmistakably specific. He understood this perfectly and magnified the fact that he was "an apostle of the Gentiles" (Rom. 11 : 13; 1 : 5; Gal. 1 : 16; 2 : 7).

3. His general preparation for this work

The purpose in our present study does not call for a detailed review of the early life of Saul of Tarsus. We are, however, particularly concerned with those things which entered somewhat directly into his preparation for his great mission in later years.

(1) He was a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, "a citizen of no mean city" (Acts 21 : 39). His surroundings here must have had a profound influence upon his life. It was a "free city," governed by its own magistrates and exempt from Roman tribute. It was noted as a seat of literature and philosophy, and as a center of commerce. Here, during all his early years, he must have felt in a very marked way the potent influences of Gentile life.

(2) He was a Roman citizen. To the chief

captain who said: "With a great sum obtained I this citizenship" Paul could reply with pride: "But I am a Roman born" (Acts 22 : 28). With Rome ruling the world this citizenship was a peculiarly valuable possession for one who had a mission to all the world. We shall see later how he had occasion to appeal to this fact of his citizenship.

(3) He was an educated man. We do not know to what extent he attended the schools of Tarsus or imbibed the learning of that educational center. But with the type of mind which he possessed he must have profited by his surroundings; and his work in later years showed acquaintance if not familiarity with Greek literature and philosophy. But his more careful and thorough education was obtained in Jerusalem "at the feet of Gamaliel" (Acts 22 : 3), the "Great Rabbi," the "Beauty of the Law." Here he was trained in the laws and traditions of the Jews. "A Pharisee" and "the son of a Pharisee" (Acts 23 : 6), he sought to qualify himself at the feet of this truly great teacher, to render efficient service to his people and to his God. But in doing this he was unconsciously making preparation for a much larger service than he at that time conceived.

4. His special preparation

A period of eight or ten years elapsed from the time of his conversion until he entered upon his direct work as apostle to the Gentiles. Three years

of this time were spent in Arabia and Damascus (Gal. 1 : 17, 18). Evidently these were years of retirement and study. He needed to study the Scriptures anew. His whole system of thought required reconstruction. And at the same time he was awaiting orders from his new Leader. At the end of this time he preached with great power in Damascus and was compelled to flee for his life. He went to Jerusalem and began work there, but the opposition was so strong that he was sent to Tarsus (Acts 9 : 29, 30). And there at his old home he remained a number of years, until Barnabas sought him out and brought him to Antioch to help in the work there (Acts 11 : 25, 26). Almost nothing is known of Paul's life during these years at Tarsus. He doubtless preached in Cilicia, and went on with his studies. God takes time to prepare his workmen. Moses was forty years in Egypt and forty years in Midian getting ready for his life's work. But not only did Saul need preparation, but the field must also be made ready. The larger conception of the gospel was at work in the churches. The message of life was finding its way to the Gentiles, and a new center at Antioch was being provided; and when the time came the new leader was ready.



Quiz

What was the growing need in the church? What is the first mention of Saul of Tarsus? Why did he

set out for Damascus? What occurred as he drew near the city? State the essential features of his conversion. With what message was Ananias sent to him? What claim did Paul make for himself? In what way was he probably influenced by his boyhood surroundings? What does he say of his citizenship? Where and under whom was he specially educated? How much time elapsed between his conversion and his entering upon his missionary work? Where and how was this time spent? Why this long period of waiting?

Suggested Topics

Character and work of Gamaliel.

The city of Tarsus.

Variations in the different accounts of Paul's conversion.

The most probable date of Paul's conversion.

Part II

Antioch as Center

“ And Also to the Greek ”

CHAPTER I

ENTRANCE UPON A NEW PERIOD

THE period which we are now about to consider extends from the coming of Saul of Tarsus to Antioch, A. D. 44, until his death in Rome A. D. 68. The dates here given, and those found in subsequent chapters, are taken from the chronological table found in Conybeare and Howson's "Life and Epistles of St. Paul." This period of about twenty-two years is mostly covered by the last sixteen chapters of the book of Acts.

The central feature of these years was the establishing of Christianity among the Gentiles, and our present study has to do with the entrance upon this great work. Gentile converts, as we have seen, had been won before this, but there had been no well-defined effort in this direction. Now, however, an aggressive movement was begun for the evangelization of the Gentile world.

At the threshold of this undertaking we may well pause to study with some care the situation.

1. A glance at the world as then known

There were vague reports of far-off lands and strange peoples, and Arabia and Babylonia and

some other countries to the east were known. But the world which filled the thought of that day was confined almost wholly to those lands which lay contiguous to the Mediterranean Sea. Here were the nations of wealth, culture, and power. The Greek language and learning had gone everywhere, greatly facilitating communication between different peoples, and preparing the way for the work of the early Christian missionaries. Alexandria, in Egypt, had become a remarkable center of Greek culture.

The authority of the Roman empire was accepted by all these nations, so that Paul's Roman citizenship secured a ready passport wherever he wished to go. The Jews had been scattered all through these Mediterranean nations, so that everywhere, in all the important centers, their synagogues were found and their religious conceptions had become familiar to many. At the same time with the growth of wealth and learning and power throughout the Roman empire, there had been a loss of faith in the old-time religions and a growing tendency to extravagance and dissipation. It was a proud, selfish, dissatisfied, wicked, weak, and hopeless world. In the providence of God the way had been made ready among these nations, and now the time had come for a great forward movement in the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the inauguration of his larger kingdom.

2. Antioch, the new center

Naturally Jerusalem was the center of the first operations of Christianity. But conservatism was so pronounced there, and Judaistic conceptions so strong, that it could not be the center for the larger work upon which Christianity was about to enter.

Three hundred miles to the north of Jerusalem, on the river Orontes, sixteen miles from the sea, was the famous ancient city of Antioch, "the queen of the East." It was the third city in wealth and population in the Roman empire. Gibbon estimates that it had a population at this time of at least half a million. This population was made up of all classes and nationalities. In touch with Palestine and the East, Antioch was also thoroughly identified with the Greek and Roman world. It thus occupied a peculiarly strategic position, fitting it in every way to become "the second capital of Christianity."

3. The church at Antioch

Christian work was begun in this city shortly after the persecution following the stoning of Stephen. Disciples, whose names are not given, went "as far as Phœnicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none save only to Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene who, when they came to Antioch, spake unto the Greeks, also preaching the Lord Jesus.

And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number that believed turned unto the Lord " (Acts 11 : 19-21).

Evidently these Gentile converts were at once received into the church, and this new church at this new center was made up of both Jews and Gentiles without any distinction. When the brethren at Jerusalem heard of the work in Samaria they sent Peter and John to look after it. So now when they heard of the ingathering at Antioch they sent Barnabas to counsel and help in the work. He was "a man of Cyprus" (Acts 4 : 36), and likely to take a liberal view of the situation. He was also "a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (Acts 11 : 24), and thus admirably qualified to meet the exigencies of the case. He worked on for a time with great success "and much people was added to the Lord." He saw the magnitude and possibilities of the work, and felt that he must have help. He was the one in Jerusalem, some years before, who had been the first to recognize the worth and come to the defense of the converted Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9 : 27). And now in this time of need of reinforcements at Antioch he thought at once of this bold and able preacher, "and he went forth to Tarsus to seek for Saul" (Acts 11 : 25), who undoubtedly was actively engaged in preaching the gospel and was readily found. He returned with Barnabas to Antioch, and "for a whole year they were gathered together with the church and taught

much people" (Acts 11 : 26). Thus this essentially Gentile church became thoroughly established and prepared to lead in a new movement.

A very significant incident occurred during this time. There was a wide-spread famine, which seems to have been especially severe in Judea. When the church at Antioch heard of this, "every man according to his ability determined to send relief unto the brethren that dwelt in Judea" (Acts 11 : 29). Barnabas and Saul were selected to take these gifts to the elders in Jerusalem. The following facts should be carefully noted:

(1) The spirit of true benevolence was manifested. "Every man," "according to his ability," gave. There would be no lack of funds for the Lord's work if all churches would give as this Antioch church gave.

(2) The larger conception of brotherhood was also seen. This church was made up largely of Gentiles; yet they forgot all race distinctions and sent help to their Jewish Christian brethren.

(3) Then too, it was an act that would tend to break down any prejudice which might exist in Judea against the new church at Antioch, and thus help to unite the forces of the gospel in the larger work of the kingdom.

4. The new name

"The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" (Acts 11 : 26). It matters little how this

name originated, whether among the friends or the enemies of Christ; it was manifestly providentially provided at the time when it was needed. It was a name which concisely, comprehensively, and clearly expressed the central truth of the new religion.

The composition of the name has often been pointed out. *Christos* is Greek, but the idea in the word is Hebrew, the Anointed One, the Messiah. It is really a Greek word with a Hebrew meaning. The suffix, *ianus*, is Latin. So that the name *Christianus* is a blending of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, meaning “partaking of” or “having the quality of Christ.” And thus a name was given which was most admirably adapted to the demands of this significant period in the growth of our religion.

5. A new departure

The spread of the gospel heretofore had been largely without any prearranged plan or definite purpose on the part of the workers. Scattered by persecution, they had simply gone about preaching the word; but now the time had come for a definite sending forth of men as missionaries to preach the gospel.

To the devoted leaders in the church at Antioch there came from the Holy Spirit the command: “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (Acts 13 : 1-3). Several facts in connection with this command must not be overlooked:

(1) It came to them while “they ministered to the Lord and fasted.” The calls of God for larger service would be more frequently heard if there were more earnest waiting upon him. If we would have more ministers and missionaries there must be a deeper spiritual life in the church.

(2) The call came to give up their best workers. How could the work at home be carried forward without Barnabas and Saul? But “there is that giveth and yet increaseth,” and the church never suffers by giving her best for the work of the world’s evangelization. And the best is unquestionably needed for the great missionary enterprise.

(3) It was a call to the church. Barnabas and Saul were called, but the church through its representatives was also called. The church was to “separate” these men to the work. We are not to regard the “laying on of hands and prayer” as a formal ordination by which Barnabas and Saul were inducted into “the gospel ministry,” for both of them had already been for some time preaching the gospel; but it was rather a setting apart to this special service to which the Holy Spirit had designated them, and also an expression of the church’s participation in, and responsibility for, this great undertaking.



Quiz

What are the limits of the period we are about to study? The central feature of this period? What

were the limits of the ancient known world? In what way had these nations been prepared for the gospel? Where was Antioch? In what way was it fitted to be a new center for Christianity? Who established the church at Antioch? Who was sent from Jerusalem? What was the character of this new church? Why did Saul come here to labor? What significance attached to their sending help to Judea? In what way was the new name peculiarly fitting? How were Barnabas and Saul called and set apart to missionary work?

Suggested Topics

The city of Antioch.

The extent of the use of the Greek language at the time of Paul.

Scriptural teaching on ordination.

Religion in Greece and Rome at this period.

A study of the names of the leaders in the Antioch church.

CHAPTER II

PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

PAUL had probably passed the forty-fifth year of his age when he entered upon his aggressive missionary work. What are commonly known as his three missionary journeys covered a period of about ten years, extending from his departure from Antioch, A. D. 48, to A. D. 58, the time of his final visit to Jerusalem. Our plan of study does not contemplate an extended consideration of these missionary journeys, but rather a comprehensive view of them in their relation to the missionary zeal and early spread of Christianity.

I. The time of each of these journeys

The first, the record of which is found in Acts 13 : 4 to 14 : 27, occupied about a year, being much shorter than the others. Following this first journey the conference at Jerusalem was held, and something over a year elapsed before the second tour was undertaken. This covered a period of about three years, the record of which is found in Acts 15 : 36 to 18 : 22. The third journey, Acts 18 : 23 to 21 : 15, was undertaken shortly after the completion of the second, and extended over a period of about four years.

2. Countries and cities visited

The first journey was confined to the island of Cyprus, the native place of Barnabas (Acts 4 : 36), and the southeastern portion of Asia Minor, in the provinces not far removed from Cilicia in which Paul's home was located and where he had been working before going to Antioch. Eight towns and cities were visited, principal among which were Antioch of Pisidia, and Iconium.

The second journey was much more extended. After visiting the churches established during the first tour, and also going throughout Phrygia and Galatia (Acts 16 : 6), Paul went westward several hundred miles to Troas, and there had the vision of the man of Macedonia, saying, "Come over into Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16 : 7). This call was at once obeyed, and at the ancient city of Philippi the first converts in Europe were made—and the first church established. Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica, and Berea were visited in Macedonia, and then Paul went to Athens, and later to Corinth, where he remained about a year and a half, and then returned to Antioch by the way of Ephesus and Jerusalem. This second missionary journey must always be associated with the introduction of the gospel into Europe, and the protracted stay at Corinth.

The third journey covered substantially the same ground as the second. At the famous city of Ephesus a great work opened up and he remained

there nearly three years. After that he made a somewhat hurried trip through Macedonia, did some work in Illyricum (Rom. 15 : 19), and then went south to Corinth to look after the church there which was having trouble. He then returned by way of Macedonia, and hastened to Jerusalem in order to reach that city in time for the feast of Pentecost. This third journey enlarged the work in regions that had already been visited, but is to be associated particularly with the great work done at Ephesus.

3. Paul's associates in his missionary journeys

Great men gather about themselves strong helpers. Paul knew how to enlist capable workers in the enterprise in which he was engaged. At the outset it was "Barnabas and Saul" who were separated unto the work (Acts 13 : 2, 7). But soon the order of the names was changed. Saul had now fairly entered upon his mission to the Gentiles and he at once came to the front. Just at this significant point his Hebrew name Saul ceased to be used, and his Roman name Paul was employed (Acts 13 : 9). And thereafter it was no longer "Barnabas and Saul," but "Paul and Barnabas" (Acts 13 : 43, 46, 50).

During the year that they had labored together at Antioch they were sent to Judea with contributions for those who were suffering because of the famine. Upon their return they brought with them "John, whose surname was Mark" (Acts 12 : 25). He

was a relative of Barnabas (Col. 4 : 10), and there are many reasons for regarding him as the evangelist Mark. He was an associate of Paul and Barnabas at the outset of this journey. But at Pamphylia he "departed from them and returned to Jerusalem" (Acts 13 : 12). No explanation is given for his conduct, but whatever his reasons were Paul was not satisfied with his course (Acts 15 : 39). Barnabas was the only one with Paul during the balance of this first journey.

The associates in the second journey were Silas, or Silvanus, Timothy, and Luke. A sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas in reference to taking John Mark with them again, caused their separation (Acts 15 : 36-40). Silas, whom Paul selected to go with him, was one of the "chief men among the brethren" whom the conference at Jerusalem (Acts 15 : 22) selected to bear letters to the Gentile brethren in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Timothy, whose mother was a Jewess and whose father was a Greek, was a native of Derbe or Lystra, and was evidently converted during Paul's previous visit to these places (Acts 16 : 1-3). Luke's name is not mentioned in the narrative, and his presence with Paul is known only by the introduction of the first personal pronoun. The first instance of this is at Troas (Acts 16 : 10), and continues until Paul and Silas were in Philippi, a short time afterward (Acts 16 : 17). Luke evidently was not arrested with them, and there is no evidence that he

was with them during this journey after they left Philippi. Silas and Timothy continued with him, and later for a short time Priscilla and Aquila were also his associates (Acts 18 : 2, 18).

As Paul started upon his third missionary tour there is no mention of any companions whatever (Acts 18 : 23), but later Erastus and Timothy are named as being among them who ministered unto him (Acts 19 : 22). "Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia," are also mentioned as his companions in travel (Acts 19 : 29). And still others are given who accompanied him (Acts 20 : 4). Luke also joined him again, probably at Philippi (Acts 20 : 5, 6), and continued with him until they reached Jerusalem, the end of this third missionary journey (Acts 21 : 15).

4. The more prominent events of each of these journeys

The judgment of blindness upon Elymas the sorcerer, and the conversion of the pro-consul Sergius Paulus at Paphos, in Cyprus (Acts 13 : 6-12); Paul's great sermon at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13 : 16-41); the opposition of the Jews and the direct and positive turning to the Gentiles (Acts 13 : 44-48); the persecution at Iconium (Acts 14 : 5, 6); the healing of the lame man at Lystra; the superstition of the people and their attempted worship of Paul and Barnabas, soon followed by the stoning of Paul (Acts 14 : 8-20); the revisiting of the churches to encourage them and to appoint elders

for them (Acts 14 : 22, 23), constitute the principal events of the first missionary journey.

The second journey, as we have seen, was much more extended, and consumed much more time than the first. It was during this journey that “the decrees from the apostles and elders at Jerusalem” concerning the position and duties of the Gentiles were delivered to the churches (Acts 16 : 4). The Holy Spirit forbade them to preach in Asia, and restrained them from going into Bithynia (Acts 16 : 6, 7), plainly directing their course to Troas where came the vision of the man of Macedonia, and the call to enter Europe (Acts 16 : 9). Then followed in rapid succession the conversion and baptism of Lydia and her household (Acts 16 : 14, 15), the healing of the damsel possessed with a spirit of divination, the consequent trouble and imprisonment, the miraculous deliverance from prison, together with the conversion of the jailer and his household, Paul’s assertion of his rights as a Roman citizen, and their departure from Philippi (Acts 16 : 16-40). A little later Paul visited Athens and preached on Mars’ Hill (Acts 17 : 22-31). Then followed the year and a half of work in Corinth (Acts 18 : 1-18), which was of the utmost importance in establishing the gospel in Europe. The brief stop at Ephesus (Acts 18 : 19-21) on his return trip in this second journey was important as preparing the way for his great work there a little later.

As we follow Paul in his third journey many in-

teresting events are to be noted. There was the meeting of Paul and Apollos at Ephesus, and later the baptism, or rebaptism, of the twelve disciples of John the Baptist, who knew nothing about the Holy Spirit (Acts 19 : 1-7). Then followed the three years' work at Ephesus, during which time the surrounding regions were also reached, and many churches established (Acts 19 : 26; 20 : 31). Then came the riot led by Demetrius the silversmith (Acts 19 : 23-41), and after that Paul's departure to revisit the churches in Greece and Macedonia (Acts 20 : 1). And then followed his return to Jerusalem with the interesting stops on the way at Troas (Acts 20 : 6-12), at Miletus (Acts 20 : 17-38), at Tyre (Acts 21 : 3-6), at Ptolemais (Acts 21 : 7), and at Cæsarea (Acts 21 : 8-14). The spirit of the great apostle amid all of these stirring and trying events is strikingly seen in his reply to the brethren at Cæsarea who tried to persuade him not to go to Jerusalem: "What do ye, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21 : 13).



Quiz

How old was Paul when he entered upon his missionary work? What period is covered by the three missionary journeys? What time was occupied by each? Where was work done during the first

journey? The second? The third? Who were Paul's associates during each of these journeys? How is Luke's presence indicated? When was he with Paul? When and why was the name Saul exchanged for Paul? What were the principal events of each journey?

Suggested Topics

A study of Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus.

An outline of Paul's sermon at Antioch of Pisidia.

The separation of Paul and Barnabas.

The worship of Diana.

The distances traveled in each missionary journey.

CHAPTER III

GENTILE CHRISTIANS AND JEWISH LAW

AFTER Peter had preached the gospel to the Gentile Cornelius, he was called upon by "the apostles and the brethren that were in Judea" to explain how it was that he had gone in unto and had eaten with men who were uncircumcised (Acts 11 : 1-4). This conference did not attempt to settle the questions involved in receiving the Gentiles into the church. They simply listened to Peter's recital of the way God had made his will known and rejoiced that also unto the Gentiles he had granted repentance unto life. But the work at Antioch, and Paul's first missionary journey brought this whole question of the Gentiles to the front for settlement. On what terms should they be received into the church, and should Jewish and Gentile Christians mingle freely with each other? When the work first began in Antioch we recall that Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to look after it, and that he soon secured the assistance of Paul. They evidently taught the true spirit of gospel liberty in receiving the Gentiles into the church. For some reason Peter not long afterward came to Antioch (Gal. 2 : 11). It is quite possible that the church at Jerusalem was not satisfied with the reports which came from the

Syrian city. Peter, upon his arrival, fell in with Barnabas and Saul, and mingled freely with the Gentile Christians and ate with them. But when "certain came from James" (Gal. 2 : 12-14) who did not approve this course in connection with the Gentiles, Peter, and even Barnabas, drew back and separated themselves from their Gentile brethren; but with great earnestness Paul withstood this reactionary course and insisted that the Gentiles must not be brought into bondage to the ceremonial law; and it would seem that for the time Paul's teaching prevailed. But during his absence on his first missionary tour these Judaizing teachers evidently were active, and upon his return he found strife and divisions. Unable to adjust matters "the brethren appointed that Paul and Barnabas and certain other of them should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question" (Acts 15 : 2). Thus sent, they proceeded at once to Jerusalem, and upon their arrival one of the most important Christian conferences ever convened was held.

1. The character of the gathering

This assembly in Jerusalem has frequently been called the first Christian council. But inasmuch as a council is made up of delegates from various churches, this gathering could not properly be so designated. And yet the germinal idea of the council is undoubtedly here. Two gatherings are mentioned. First, "they were received of the church,

and the apostles and the elders, and they rehearsed all things that God had done with them" (Acts 15 : 4). This was evidently a preliminary meeting. Then, probably the following day, "the apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter" (Acts 15 : 6). That the whole church was also present and participated in the proceedings is evident from subsequent statements. "And all the multitude kept silence, and they hearkened unto Barnabas and Paul" (Acts 15 : 12). Then, in reaching a conclusion it is declared: "It seemed good unto the apostles and the elders, with the whole church to choose men out of their company," etc. (Acts 15 : 22). This is important as showing the participation of the whole church in Jerusalem in these deliberations.

2. The question before this Conference

"And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, saying, except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses ye cannot be saved" (Acts 15 : 1). This is a concise statement of the question as it was raised in Antioch, which led to the sending of the delegation to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas stated the matter to the conference as follows: "There rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, saying, It is needful to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15 : 5).

It is readily seen that this question was of vital

import. These Judaizing teachers proposed to make Christianity simply an addition to Judaism. The Gentiles could not partake of Christ's gracious work unless they would become obedient to the Mosaic ceremonial law. To become Christians they must also become Jewish proselytes. On the other hand, Paul and those with him maintained that the ceremonial law was in no way binding upon the Gentiles. Christianity was something higher, larger, and apart from Judaism. The Gentiles could come to Christ and be saved without any reference to the Mosaic law. Such was the fundamental, far-reaching question which was before this conference. It is well to note here the fact that this question had nothing to do with the Jewish Christian's relation to the ceremonial law. That question would come up later. For the present it was the question of the Gentile Christian and the Jewish law.

3. The deliberations of this Conference

Evidently those present realized in large degree the importance of the gathering, and the proceedings were marked by a gravity and dignity in keeping with the vital character of the matter under consideration. First, there was much general discussion (Acts 15 : 6), which is not recorded. Then Peter arose and addressed the meeting. The real greatness of Peter's character is manifest in his course at this time. In a moment of weakness, at Antioch a year or more before, he may have sided

with the Judaizing party, but now he stood boldly forth, told his own experiences in preaching the gospel to Cornelius, and insisted that God had received the Gentiles by faith, without the intervention of any ceremonial observance. And then he uttered these remarkable words: "Now therefore why make ye trial of God, that ye should put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we are able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they" (Acts 15 : 10, 11). It was a noble epoch-making address, and prepared the way for a favorable consideration of the words of Paul and Barnabas who then rehearsed "the signs and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles through them" (Acts 15 : 12). And now the time had come for James, "the brother of our Lord," the pastor of the Jerusalem church, and the head of the conservative party, to speak. He too made a remarkable address. He spoke in favor of the larger liberty, and based his argument upon two things: Peter's experience and "the words of the prophets" (Acts 15 : 13-18). And then he gave his judgment as to what ought to be done (Acts 15 : 19-21), and this was adopted by the "apostles and elders, with the whole church" (Acts 15 : 22).

4. The findings of the Conference

It was decided to write a letter "unto the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, and

Cilicia ” (Acts 15 : 23), and to send this letter by chosen men, Judas and Silas, “ chief men among the brethren ” (Acts 15 : 22). Three features of this letter (Acts 15 : 23-29) should be specially noted:

(1) They disclaimed all responsibility for the work that had been done by those Judaizing teachers in Antioch. “ Certain went out from us . . . to whom we gave no commandment.”

(2) There was a cordial indorsement of Paul and Barnabas. “ Our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

(3) And then followed the “ necessary things ” which the Gentile Christians should observe: *a.* “ Abstain from things offered to idols ”; *b.* “ from blood ”; *c.* “ from things strangled ”; and *d.* “ from fornication.” These findings were in some measure a concession to Jewish prejudices, but as there was no allusion to circumcision, and as the things required had much more to do with moral than with ceremonial matters, the outcome of the conference was in every way a great triumph for the gospel truth.

Were the decisions of this conference authoritative or advisory? Two things are to be noted in answering this question. First, the initiative was with the Antioch church. The Jerusalem church did not exercise any authority over them, but they sought advice and counsel from Jerusalem; and secondly, the form of the communication sent out was not

mandatory, but rather suggestive and advisory. “It seemed good unto us, having come to one accord” (Acts 15 : 25), and “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and unto us” (Acts 15 : 28). They speak of the unanimity of their decision, and the approval of the Holy Spirit in order to give weight to it. This would have been entirely unnecessary had it been an authoritative body issuing decrees which would be binding upon the churches.



Quiz

What was the occasion of the first conference in Jerusalem (11 : 1-4)? What question was made prominent by the work in Antioch and the first missionary journey? Why did Peter go to Antioch, and what course did he pursue? How did the Antioch church propose to settle its trouble? Was the gathering in Jerusalem a council? Who participated in this conference? What was the question before the conference? What position did Peter take? What was James' argument? What was the outcome of these deliberations? Were the decisions of this conference authoritative or merely advisory?

Suggested Topics

The great ecumenical councils.

The place and value of modern church councils.

Modern Christian Jews and Jewish rites.

James, the brother of our Lord.

CHAPTER IV

PERSECUTIONS AND IMPRISONMENTS

WHEN Ananias was sent to Saul of Tarsus in Damascus the Lord said: "I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9 : 16). Much of that which he suffered was incident to the exposures and trials of his journeys. "In perils of rivers, in perils of robbers . . . in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea . . . in labor and travail, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Cor. 11 : 25-27). But there were other trials which were much worse. "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned." He says he was "in perils from my countrymen; . . . in perils among false brethren" (2 Cor. 11 : 24, 26). The missionary enterprise from the first has been marked by heroic sacrifice and suffering.

1. Reasons why Paul was persecuted by the Jews

Paul did not suffer much direct persecution at the hands of the Gentiles. At Philippi he was seized by the authorities and thrown into prison at the instigation of those who had been making "much gain" from the soothsaying of a damsel, possessed

of a spirit of divination, whom Paul healed (Acts 16 : 16-24). And at Ephesus serious opposition was stirred up by Demetrius, a silversmith, whose business of making "silver shrines for Diana" was seriously interfered with by the work of Paul (Acts 19 : 23-27). While the Roman authorities imprisoned Paul later, it was through the direct influence of the Jews. And the persecutions he suffered during his missionary journeys were nearly all brought about by the Jews.

There were two causes which operated to produce this persecution :

(1) First, there was jealousy. The first serious opposition which arose as Paul and Barnabas set out upon their work, was at Antioch in Pisidia. The cause of the trouble is thus stated: "But when the Jews saw the multitudes they were filled with jealousy and contradicted the things spoken by Paul and blasphemed" (Acts 13 : 45). The people were tired of the empty forms of Judaism, and wherever Paul went preaching in the synagogues multitudes were eager to hear. And this roused the jealousy of those who were the teachers of a lifeless traditionalism.

(2) But a second cause was the teaching of Paul. He opened wide the door of the gospel to the Gentile world. He utterly repudiated the traditions and prejudices of the rabbis, and taught that God "made of one every nation of men" (Acts 17 : 26) and he preached a religion "where there cannot be Greek

and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3 : 11). Jewish ceremonialism must give place now that Jesus had come. Thus it appeared to the Jews that Paul's teachings were utterly subversive of Judaism, and so they bitterly and persistently opposed him.

2. Persecutions during his missionary journeys

At Antioch in Pisidia during the first tour "the Jews urged on the devout women of honorable estate and the chief men of the city and stirred up a persecution against Paul and Barnabas and cast them out of their borders" (Acts 13 : 50). They went to Iconium. Here again the Jews stirred up violent opposition: "And when there was made an onset both of the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers to treat them shamefully and to stone them, they became aware of it and fled unto the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra, and Derbe, and the region round about" (Acts 14 : 5, 6). There they preached and multitudes were reached. "But then came Jews thither from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the multitude, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead" (Acts 14 : 19). Though Paul and Barnabas on their return visited each of the cities where they had preached, there is no record of further persecution here. This may have been due in part to the fact that their second visit was not so much for general

public work as it was to encourage and strengthen the churches.

The first recorded trouble with the Jews during the second missionary journey was at Thessalonica. There "the Jews being moved with jealousy took unto them certain vile fellows of the rabble and gathering a crowd set the city in an uproar" (Acts 17 : 5) ; and Paul and Silas went on to Berea. But here through the influence of Jews from Thessalonica, persecution again broke out, and Paul went to Athens and thence to Corinth. Here again the Jews bitterly opposed him, and endeavored to stop his work, but he refused to be driven out and continued his labors for a year and six months. This was done, doubtless, in the face of constant persecution.

There is very little recorded persecution by the Jews during the third missionary journey. At the beginning of the three years' work in Ephesus there was the usual conflict with the Jews (Acts 19 : 8, 9). But they, apparently, were powerless in that great city to interfere seriously with his work. Later when Paul made a visit into Greece there was a plot to kill him, which he found out, and which led to the change of his course in returning to Jerusalem (Acts 20 : 2, 3).

It is an interesting fact that in practically all the places where Paul encountered the severest opposition and persecution, there vigorous churches were established,

3. Paul's arrest at Jerusalem

During his return from his third missionary journey Paul had repeated intimations that there was trouble ahead, and that bonds and imprisonment awaited him. But he declared: "I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21 : 13). Immediately upon his reaching Jerusalem he was gladly welcomed by the brethren, and reported at once to James and the elders "the things which God had wrought among the Gentiles through his ministry, and when they heard it they glorified God" (Acts 21 : 17-20). James proposed a course for Paul which he thought would allay the suspicions of the Judaistic party (21 : 23-28), but it utterly failed, and soon Paul was at the mercy of a raging rabble that would have destroyed him had not the Roman authorities interposed and rescued him (Acts 21 : 20-36).

It is important not to overlook the real cause of this violent opposition to Paul. It was not that he had preached the gospel to the Gentiles. Nor was it that he had received the Gentiles into the church without their submitting to the Jewish ceremonial law. It was a new question now. "They have been informed concerning thee, that thou teachest all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs" (Acts 21 : 21). Was this information correct? So far as the Jew was dis-

posed to observe the ceremonial law as conforming to and preserving national life Paul made no objection whatever, but when these laws and customs were presented as essentials to salvation either for Jew or Gentile then he opposed them and insisted that salvation was in Christ and in him alone. There was a distinction here that many of the Jews would not make, and they thought they saw in Paul's teachings a direct assault upon their national life and their peculiar position as the chosen people of God. Hence the violent opposition which led to Paul's arrest.

4. The imprisonments which followed

The period covered by Paul's missionary journeys was about ten years. These were years of intense activity. With his arrest at Jerusalem he entered upon another ten years, A. D. 58 to 68, which was spent largely in prison and was terminated with his martyrdom at Rome. Between two and three years of this time were spent in prison at Cæsarea. Then came the eventful voyage to Rome, consuming some eight or ten months. The imprisonment in Rome followed. Here he was given large liberties as a prisoner, "and he abode two whole years in his own hired dwelling and received all that went in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, none forbidding him" (Acts 28 : 30). These words close the book of Acts. Writers are not

agreed as to what happened after these two years. Paul seems to have been released for a time and to have revisited Macedonia (Phil. 2 : 24) and Asia Minor (Philem. 22), and possibly he went to Spain (Rom. 15 : 24, 28). Then followed his rearrest and imprisonment again at Rome when he wrote to his beloved Timothy: "I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come" (2 Tim. 4 : 6).

Paul's years of imprisonment were rich in fruitage for the kingdom of God. He was permitted to preach to those who came to him. His influence in Rome reached even to Cæsar's household (Phil. 4 : 21). His courage inspired others and made them bold to speak the word of God (Phil. 1 : 14). His defenses (Acts 22 : 1-21; 24 : 10-25; 26 : 1-32), made before the Jewish and Roman authorities, were masterly expositions of the gospel; while the letters written during this time constitute an invaluable heritage to Christianity.



Quiz

In what ways was Paul called upon to suffer? Why did the Jews oppose and persecute him? What was the occasion of the trouble at Philippi? At Ephesus? What led to the stoning at Lystra? What troubles arose during the second missionary journey? What was the result of these various persecutions? What new question arose upon

Paul's last visit to Jerusalem? What was his position in reference to it? Where was Paul imprisoned and how long? Why was he taken to Rome? What helpful results came from Paul's imprisonment?

Suggested Topics

Ancient treatment of prisoners.

Modern traffic in idolatrous images.

Detailed account of Paul's voyage to Rome.

Evidence of a release and second imprisonment at Rome.

Paul's last days and death.

CHAPTER V

PAUL'S LETTERS

PAUL was greatly concerned for the welfare of the churches which he organized. He sought to make disciples and then to teach them to observe all things whatsoever Christ had commanded. He endeavored to conserve and make permanent his work. Hence his repeated visits to the churches which he established, and his letters to them of warning, encouragement, and instruction. Each of these letters has a most interesting historical setting and needs to be studied in the light of the circumstances which called it forth. The purpose of our present study does not require a careful analysis of each Epistle, but simply the noting of its leading thoughts and its place in the beginnings of Christianity. It hardly needs to be said that the notes appended to these letters in the King James version, purporting to give the places of their writing, are in no sense whatever a part of the inspired text. In several instances they are entirely misleading. Without attempting to go into the evidences bearing upon the question of the place where each was written we will accept the conclusions reached by Conybeare and Howson as being on the whole reasonably satisfactory.

1. Paul's first letters

There is no record of his having written any letters until his second missionary journey. We recall that during this journey he spent a year and six months at Corinth. But shortly before going to this city he preached the gospel in Thessalonica, a city of Macedonia, not far from Philippi. Though driven out of this place by persecution, he did not go until a strong church had been gathered. We read of his work there: "And some of them were persuaded and consorted with Paul and Silas, and of the devout Greeks a great multitude and of the chief women not a few" (Acts 17 : 4). During the earlier part of Paul's stay at Corinth word came to him of the trials and needs of the church at Thessalonica, and he wrote to it what is known as First Thessalonians. This is the first recorded Epistle of the Apostle Paul, written probably A. D. 52. It is full of appreciation, encouragement, and instruction. He seeks also to correct a mistake into which they had fallen concerning some who had died since he was there. They evidently thought that those who "fell asleep" before Christ's second coming would not enjoy the same privileges as those who should be alive at that great event. But Paul wrote them: "We that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep" (1 Thess. 4 : 13-18). As this is Paul's first letter it is well to read and reread it, not only to learn of the condition and

needs of this early Christian church, but also to see the character of Paul himself. One cannot carefully study this letter without being greatly drawn toward the writer of it.

But Paul's words in reference to the second coming of Christ were misunderstood, and an unwarranted expectancy of that event was developed in the church, and so, later on in his stay at Corinth, he wrote another letter to this same church. In this second Epistle he says: "Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand; let no man beguile you in any wise; for it shall not be except the falling away come first and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" (2 Thess. 2 : 1-12). This second letter also is full of the earnestness and warmth of a great heart.

2. Letters written during his third missionary journey

About three years of Paul's third missionary journey, as we have seen, were spent at Ephesus. There was ready means of communication between Corinth and Ephesus, and during his stay at the latter place he must have had frequent reports from the Corinthian church. The conditions there led to the writing of a letter which has not been preserved (1 Cor. 5 : 9-12); and later to the sending

of what is known as the First Epistle to the Corinthians. A careful reading of this Epistle shows that it was written to correct abuses and meet difficulties which had arisen in the church at Corinth. There were divisions in the church and a serious case of wrong-doing calling for discipline, and brethren were going to law with each other before unbelievers. There were questions arising relative to marriage, to things offered to idols, to the support of the ministry, to the Lord's Supper, to spiritual gifts, to the resurrection of the dead, and to Christian beneficence. All of these Paul dealt with in this letter in a most direct and comprehensive manner.

When he left Ephesus at the close of his long term of labor there he went to Troas, where he expected to meet Titus with word from Corinth (2 Cor. 2 : 12, 13), but he did not come, and Paul went on into Macedonia, probably to Philippi, where he met Titus (2 Cor. 7 : 5, 6), and was greatly comforted. Titus brought encouraging news from the church at Corinth. The former letter had borne good fruit, and yet the church still needed instruction, encouragement, and warning. And there at Philippi Paul wrote the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. There is a note of depression running through the Epistle which some suppose was in part due to physical suffering which the apostle was enduring (2 Cor. 7 : 5; 12 : 7-10; 4 : 16).

A few months later he left Macedonia and visited

Corinth in person (Acts 20 : 1-3). Here word reached him of the defection among the churches of Galatia. Judaizing teachers had come in and were doing great harm. The Epistle to the Galatians at once followed. Its severity, directness, and powerful presentation of the truth of the gospel reveal the gravity of the situation and the dangerous nature of the error that was being promulgated.

At this time Paul had in his mind a definite purpose to visit Rome (Acts 19 : 21). Undoubtedly many converted elsewhere had gone to Rome, and a strong church had been formed there. Many of the members of this church were personal friends of Paul (Rom. 16 : 1-16). And so, with his purposed visit in mind, before leaving Corinth he wrote a letter to the church in Rome. Influenced doubtless by the Judaizing tendencies in Galatia to which his mind had just been directed, which emphasized the necessity of a clear and comprehensive statement of gospel truth, and recognizing the commanding position of the capital of the empire, he wrote a letter which, more than any other writing that has come from the pen of man, has influenced the thought and molded the doctrine of Christianity.

3. Letters written during his first imprisonment at Rome

If Paul wrote any letters from the time he left Corinth in his last missionary journey until he reached Rome as prisoner some three or four years later they have not been preserved.

Considerable liberty was granted him at Rome. As a prisoner in his own hired dwelling he was permitted to receive his friends. Thus it was that messages reached him from the fields where he had formerly labored. Onesimus, a runaway slave from Colossæ, was converted at Rome, and Paul wrote a letter to his master, "Philemon, our beloved fellow-laborer" (Philem. 1 : 1), and sent Onesimus back not as a slave but as a brother. Epaphras, also from Colossæ (Col. 1 : 7), came to Rome and reported the incoming of errors into the church in reference to the worship of angels, gnostic philosophy, and observance of Jewish festivals. This led to the writing of the Epistle to the Colossians.

The letter to the Ephesians, written about this same time, was probably designed for all the churches in the region around about Ephesus, and was written to meet conditions quite similar to those in Colossæ.

Epaphroditus came to Rome from Philippi with an offering for Paul from the church there. Doubtless he also brought many heartfelt messages of friendship and Christian love. Paul was deeply moved by these tokens of regard and wrote the Epistle to the Philippians, full of affection and appreciation.

4. Letters written between imprisonments at Rome

After two or three years' imprisonment at Rome it is probable that Paul had his liberty for several

years before his final imprisonment and death. During this period of freedom he wrote two letters, 1 Timothy and Titus. The places from which they were written are largely a matter of conjecture; the former possibly from Macedonia and the latter from Ephesus. The purpose for which they were written is apparent. Paul was an old man, deeply concerned for the welfare of the churches, and in these letters he gave earnest counsel to two young pastors as to their duties and responsibilities in the care of the churches.

5. Paul's last letter

Paul was again in prison in Rome, and evidently under harder conditions than before (2 Tim. 1 : 16, 17; 4 : 10-13). Timothy, his "true child in faith" (1 Tim. 1 : 2), had been a great comfort and help to him for many years. It is not surprising then that "Paul the aged" (Philem. 1 : 9), as he drew near the end and realized that the time of his departure had come (2 Tim. 4 : 6), wrote his last letter to his beloved Timothy; nor is it surprising that the last written words of the great apostle of the grace of God should be "Grace be with you."



Quiz

In what way did Paul seek to strengthen the churches which he established? Are the notes appended to Paul's letters in the Common version re-

liable? Why is it important to know the circumstances under which Paul wrote his letters? What was his first letter? Where and why written? What led to the writing of 2 Thessalonians? What letters did he write during his third missionary journey? What led to the writing of the Epistle to the Galatians? Under what circumstances was the Epistle to the Romans written? Where and why were the following written: To Philemon? To the Colossians? To the Ephesians? To the Philippians? What can be said of 1 Timothy and Titus? Where, when, and to whom was the last letter written?

Suggested Topics

Carefully tabulate Paul's letters as to time and place of writing.

Evidences that Paul did not write Hebrews.

Loss to the church had Paul written no letters.

Conditions in Corinth that led Paul to write 1 Corinthians.

CHAPTER VI

LABORS OF OTHERS DURING THIS PERIOD

DURING the period which we are now studying Paul and his associates occupy the foreground. It would be a great mistake, however, to suppose that others were not engaged in the work of preaching the gospel and establishing churches. But the scriptural allusions to their work are very meager. Traditions, however, to supply this lack are very abundant. These tell how each of the apostles was assigned a portion of the then known world and went forth to heroic, self-sacrificing, and successful work. It is doubtless true that many of these traditions are based upon fact, and that not only the apostles but also many others of the early disciples became efficient missionaries of the cross. But in our investigation we will pass these traditions by to consider simply the Scripture records.

1. The work of unnamed laborers

Unquestionably a vast amount of work was done during this time by those whose names are wholly unknown to the annals of earth. As we have already seen, the church at Antioch was established by those whose names are not given. Paul wrote his most important Epistle, "to all that are in Rome,

beloved of God, called to be saints" (Rom. 1 : 7). But there is no record of the establishing of this church in Rome, and we do not know who first preached the gospel in the imperial city. Among the seven churches mentioned in the opening chapters of Revelation, only one of them, that at Ephesus, is referred to in the book of Acts as having been established by the Apostle Paul. He may have visited some of these places, but the probability is that these churches were the result of work done by those whose names are unknown. A great work was begun in Egypt at this time, and a little later Alexandria became a center of Christian learning and power. But practically nothing is known as to who inaugurated the work there. There is much encouragement here for the obscure workman. The man whose name is unknown to the world may in the kingdom of God do a work of immeasurable importance—a work that will abide through the ages.

2. John the beloved disciple

Immediately following the day of Pentecost John was closely associated with Peter in the work, and it was Peter and John who were sent to look into and strengthen the work in Samaria (Acts 8 : 14). When the conference was held in Jerusalem to consider the relation of the Gentile converts to the Jewish law (Acts 15 : 6-29), "James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars" gave to Barnabas and Paul the right hand of fellowship (Gal. 2 : 9).

In the subsequent records of the book of Acts there are no references whatever to John. But we learn in Revelation 1 : 9 that he “was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” There is conclusive evidence that he was for a long period pastor in Ephesus, and his letters to the seven churches of Asia suggest his familiarity with the conditions and needs of that region. Doubtless he did much work there. But John’s great contribution to the cause of Christ was his writings: his Gospel so full of the inner life and divinity of Jesus, his letters abounding in love and tenderness, and the book of Revelation so rich in prophecy of the coming triumph and glory. While it is difficult to fix the dates of these writings, it is probable that they were all written after the death of the Apostle Paul.

3. James the Lord’s brother

James, the brother of John, one of the favored three in the apostolate, was beheaded by Herod (Acts 12 : 1, 2). There was another James among the Twelve, “the son of Alphæus” (Matt. 10 : 3), called “James the Less” (Mark 15 : 40). Some have endeavored to show that “James the Lord’s brother” (Gal. 1 : 19) and James the Less are the same. This attempt, however, has grown largely out of an unwillingness to admit that Jesus had any brothers in the flesh. The evidence is conclusive that the two are not to be regarded as one and the

same. Of the work of James the Less we have no record. But James the Lord's brother (Matt. 13 : 55; Mark 6 : 3; Gal. 1 : 19), became the leading man, evidently the bishop or pastor, of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12 : 17; 15 : 13-20; Gal. 1 : 19; 2 : 9). While he was a devout Christian, he leaned strongly toward the Judaistic party (Gal. 2 : 12). It was he who proposed to Paul a compromise, an expedient which he hoped would allay Jewish prejudice and prevent trouble (Acts 21 : 18-28), but which, like most measures of that nature, utterly failed. James unquestionably had a profound influence over the Jews, and was much more liberal in his attitude toward the Gentiles than were many who professed to follow his teachings.

This book of James, written by him "to the twelve tribes which are of the dispersion" (James 1 : 1), lays great emphasis upon the practical aspects of Christianity, and instead of being an "epistle of straw," as Luther called it, is an Epistle that greatly magnifies faith by exalting the works which faith must produce.

4. Apollos the Eloquent

Though Apollos and Paul met several times in their work they can hardly be called associates. After Paul's first brief visit to Ephesus, and before his return for his protracted period of labor there, "a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by race, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus, and he

was mighty in the Scriptures ” (Acts 18:24). But he knew only the message of John the Baptist, and his work, therefore, was very defective. “ But when Priscilla and Aquila,” Paul’s former associates, “ heard him they took him and expounded unto him the way of God more accurately ” (Acts 18 : 26). With letters from the Ephesian brethren he then went to Achaia where “ he helped them much that had believed through grace, for he powerfully confuted the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ ” (Acts 18 : 27, 28). His teaching evidently made a profound impression in Corinth for shortly afterward when Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthian church, in referring to the division there, he mentions the fact that some said, “ I am of Paul ; and I of Apollos ; and I of Cephas ; and I of Christ ” (1 Cor. 2 : 12). Paul did not admit any differences in the teaching of these leaders, but declared: “ What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Ministers through whom ye believed ; and each as the Lord gave to him. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase ” (1 Cor. 3 : 5, 6). It is probable that the information which led Paul to write from Ephesus his first letter to the Corinthians came through Apollos, who returned from Corinth to Ephesus and was there when Paul wrote this letter (2 Cor. 16 : 12), and was strongly urged by the apostle to return to Corinth, but was unwilling to do so, his reason doubtless being the divisions which had

arisen there with which his name was associated. Where his subsequent fields of labor were we do not know. But from Titus 3:13 we learn that some ten years later he was still in the work and commended by the Apostle Paul. Apollos seems to have occupied a somewhat medium ground between James and Paul. The fact that he was peculiarly strong in the Scriptures and especially effective in reaching the Jews and an eloquent and learned man, has led many to believe that he was the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

5. The Apostle Peter

In the early part of the book of Acts Peter, as we have seen, stood in the foreground, but later on his name ceases to be mentioned. James became the head man in the church at Jerusalem, and Paul was the leader of the work outside of Palestine. The last mention of Peter in the book of Acts was at the conference at Jerusalem, where he delivered the address which undoubtedly contributed very largely to the favorable decision which was reached. But some seven years later Paul referred to him in a way to show that he was still actively engaged in the work of preaching the gospel (1 Cor. 9:5). The allusion to the Cephas party in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:12), would seem to imply that he had done work there. We know that he visited Antioch (Gal. 2:11), and his first Epistle addressed to "the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and

Bithynia" (1 Peter 1 : 1), may imply that he had done work in these places. His allusion to Babylon (1 Peter 5 : 13) as the place from which he was writing, has been the occasion of much difference of opinion. Some insist that this name was applied to Rome and that he wrote from Rome. Others that there is no satisfactory reason for not taking it literally. The tradition that Peter went to Rome as bishop in the early forties and continued there for twenty-five years when he was crucified under Nero, is entirely incredible, for in A. D. 50 he was at the conference in Jerusalem, and in A. D. 57 he, with his wife, was in itinerant missionary work (1 Cor. 9 : 5). And Paul, in his letter to the Romans, and in his long imprisonment in Rome, makes no allusion whatever to Peter. Babylon, the Assyrian capital, was nearer to Jerusalem than was Rome, and was the home of many Jews, and it would have been a very natural thing for Peter to go to them with the gospel. He may have gone to Rome after Paul's death and have been crucified there, but there is no scriptural evidence that he ever visited that city. The two Epistles of Peter have the earnest, practical character which we should expect from him.



Quiz

What can be said of the traditions telling of work done by others aside from Paul and his associates? What about the unnamed laborers? What

work did John do? What was his great contribution to the cause? Who was James and what did he do? What is the leading characteristic of the Epistle of James? Who was Apollos? Where did he labor? Why was Peter less prominent during this period than formerly? Where did he labor and what letters did he write? What conclusive evidence is there that he did not have a twenty-five years' pastorate at Rome?

Suggested Topics

Evidence that Apollos wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Arguments, pro and con, for Peter's pastorate in Rome.

John's pastorate at Ephesus.

The date of John's writings.

The different Jameses.

CHAPTER VII

ORGANIZATION AND WORSHIP

MANY statements and allusions in the book of Acts, and also in the Epistles, throw much light upon church organization and worship during this period.

Two mistakes have been made at this point. One has been that of supposing that we have here a fully developed plan of church organization, that from the first there was a clearly defined ecclesiastical polity in accordance with which these New Testament churches were all organized. The other mistake has been the going to the other extreme and regarding the whole question of church organization during this period as being entirely inchoate and indeterminate, there being no church polity at that time. Advocates of this view insist that Christianity is life, and that life will assume forms and expressions best adapted to its environment. Hence, church polity may be as variable as the needs of different centuries and different peoples.

But the truth lies between these two extremes. The permanent principles upon which church organization and worship rest are found in the New Testament, and to the extent that the early churches found occasion to give expression to these principles

they became the exponents of the polity of the church for all time.

1. There was plurality of churches rather than one great all-embracing church organization

There was the church at Jerusalem, and the church at Antioch, and at Ephesus, and at Corinth, and at Thessalonica, and at Philippi, and so on. There were also "the churches of Judea" (Gal. 1 : 22), "the churches of Macedonia" (2 Cor. 8 : 1), "the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1 : 2), "the churches of Christ" (Rom. 16 : 16), "the churches of God" (1 Cor. 11 : 16), "the churches of Asia" (1 Cor. 16 : 1), "the churches of the saints" (1 Cor. 14 : 33), "the seven churches that are in Asia" (Rev. 1 : 4), and other instances where the plural is used.

In this connection two interesting questions arise.

(1) What was the relation of these separate churches to each other? They were evidently bound together by close bonds of fellowship. The church at Antioch sought counsel from the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15 : 2). The Gentile churches sent relief to the poor in Judea (Acts 11 : 29, 30; 24 : 17; Rom. 15 : 25, 26). Phœbe, a servant of the church at Cenchreæ, was commended by Paul to the church at Rome (Rom. 16 : 1). While it is manifest that the churches were united in the bonds of truth and Christian brotherhood, it is also evident that there was no central organization, or authority

of one church over another, but that each was independent in the conduct of its own affairs.

(2) The second question relates to the fact that there was but a single church in each city. There was evidently but one church in Jerusalem, but one in Antioch, and but one in Ephesus. And the same is true of the other large cities. It is supposed by some that there may have been divisions and different places of meeting, but only one church. Some urge that if we would be true to the New Testament teaching we should have but a single church in any given city. For example, New York City should have but one church, with many meeting-places. If this is the true conception it is very difficult to see why city limits should be taken into the account. Surely all the suburbs of a great city should also come in. And in these days of dense population and rapid transit, why should not the County, and Province, and State, and nation also be included? There is really no stopping-place. But the New Testament principle is separate churches to meet the needs of different communities. In the immediate apostolic days this principle called for but a single church in a city, but later churches multiplied in the cities to meet the demands of the different sections and divisions of the city.

2. The membership of the churches

Many claim to-day that the church is for all who need help. If an unconverted person wants to come

into the church, bid him welcome and thus help him to better things. Where there is a union of Church and State, persons are born into the church and church-membership has very little to do with individual faith or character. But when we turn to the New Testament we find that church-membership was for those who had come into the blessings of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel was preached, men and women accepted the message and entered into church-fellowship with each other. In his letters to the churches Paul always used terms in addressing them which showed that they were made up of converted persons. To the Romans he wrote: "Beloved of God, called to be saints" (Rom. 1 : 7). These are his words to the Corinthians: "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, even them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1 Cor. 1 : 2). The salutation to the Ephesians was: "To the saints that are at Ephesus, and the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1 : 1). But these quotations need not be multiplied. The New Testament churches were made up of those who had accepted Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as their Saviour and Lord.

3. The organization of the church

We have already, in Part I, Chapter V, noted the beginning of the divisions of labor in the Jerusalem church. The apostles, in order that they might give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word,

had seven men appointed to look after the proper distribution of funds among the dependent widows. On the one hand there were the spiritual interests of the church to be cared for, and on the other the temporal and material. Later on elders and deacons were the duly appointed officers for these two departments of work. During the first missionary journey Paul and Barnabas “appointed for them elders in every church” (Acts 14 : 23). This seems to have been in accordance with the plan of organization of the Jerusalem church (Acts 1 : 30). The church at Ephesus had elders (Acts 20 : 17). A part of the work assigned to Titus was to appoint “elders in every city” (Titus 1 : 5). James speaks of the “elders of the church” (James 5 : 4). Peter as a “fellow elder” had a special message for the elders (1 Peter 5 : 1). It is well to note here that there seems to have been a plurality of elders in each church. Another thing to be carefully observed is that the elders were also called bishops. After Paul had sent for the “elders” of Ephesus (Acts 20 : 17) he addressed them as follows: “Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops” (Acts 20 : 28). In the Epistle to Timothy (1 Tim. 5 : 1, 17, 19; 3 : 2) and in that to Titus (1 : 5, 7) the terms bishop and elder are used interchangeably. The duty of the bishops or elders was the “care of the church of God” (1 Tim. 3 : 5), “to feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own

blood" (Acts 20 : 27). They evidently had the spiritual oversight of the church. Peter wrote quite fully to the elders: "Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to the will of God; nor yet for filthy lucre but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5 : 1-3).

There were also deacons in the New Testament churches. Paul addressed "the bishops and deacons" in the Philippian church (Phil. 1 : 1). The only other direct reference to deacons is found in 1 Tim. 3 : 8-13. And here their duties are in no way described. What these duties were is largely a matter of inference. From the task assigned "the seven" (Acts 6 : 1-8); from the meaning of the word "deacon," "a servant, an attendant, a minister"; and from the fact that the spiritual oversight of the church was committed to the elders, we conclude that the deacons were charged with the temporal and material interests of the church.

We may pause here for a few words in reference to the present plan of organization of our Baptist churches. Ordinarily we have but one elder or pastor in each church. The deacons are associated with him in the spiritual care of the church, while the temporal interests are looked after, largely, by trustees and committees. These trustees and com-

mittees, however, by whatever name called, are essentially servants or deacons of the church. While it might be well to conform more closely to the New Testament divisions of duties and names of officers, still there is room here for considerable latitude so long as there is a faithful maintenance of the principles upon which rest the simplicity and democracy of the church of Christ.

4. Life and worship

There was manifestly a vigorous and aggressive life in the early churches. Many practical and doctrinal questions arose for settlement, as is evidenced by the epistles to the churches. There were also divisions, and the early churches were far from being perfect. The necessity for church discipline and the expulsion of an unworthy member arose in the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 5 : 1-13). The call for patience, forbearance, and mutual helpfulness in the church became very apparent (Rom. 14 : 1 ; 15 : 1-3 ; 12 : 10 ; Gal. 6 : 2 ; Phil. 4 : 1-3).

The worship of the churches continued very simple. The homes were largely used as meeting-places, although central places of gathering became common. In Troas they met in an "upper chamber" where were "many lights" (Acts 20 : 8). The Corinthian church had a common meeting-place (1 Cor. 11 : 20), and in Heb. 10 : 25 there is an exhortation "not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together as the custom of some is." These

gatherings were for instruction, for prayer, for the Lord's Supper, for the exercise of gifts, and for song. Evidently from the first the gospel filled the churches with song. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God" (Col. 3 : 16; Eph. 5 : 19). There is no record of the observance by any church of the Jewish Sabbath, but the first day of the week, the resurrection day, "the Lord's Day" seems to have been adopted from the first as the meeting day for Christians (John 20 : 26; Acts 20 : 7; 1 Cor. 16 : 2; Rev. 1 : 10).



Quiz

What two mistakes are made in reference to the New Testament and church polity? What is the fact in reference to plurality of churches? What was the relation of these different churches to each other? Does the New Testament teaching call for one church only in a city? What is the New Testament teaching as to the character of church-members? What division of labor early appeared in the church? Who were the officers appointed? What were their duties? What proof that elders and bishops were the same? What can be said of the church life of these early days? What were the leading features of worship?

Suggested Topics

Evils of unregenerate church-membership.

The plurality of elders.

The question of deaconesses.

Evidence that the early Christians observed the first day of the week.

The ordination of elders and deacons.

CHAPTER VIII

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

THESE ordinances have had so large a place in the history of Christianity, they have been the occasion of so much controversy and division, and have been connected with so much error that it seems desirable to note with special care their place and significance in the early years of Christianity.

1. Baptism during this period

It is evident that wherever converts were made they were at once baptized. At Philippi Lydia and her household accepted Christ and were immediately baptized (Acts 16 : 15). In the same city the jailer and his household heard the message from Paul and Silas and the same hour of the night were baptized (Acts 16 : 33). In Corinth "Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his house, and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18 : 8). The historian Kurtz, writing of this period, says: "Baptism was administered by complete immersion in the name of Christ or else of the Triune God" ("Church History," Vol. I, Sec. 18).

Several new questions in reference to baptism demand attention.

(1) Household baptisms.

Four household baptisms are mentioned: Lydia and her household (Acts 16 : 15), the jailer and his house (Acts 16 : 33, 34), Crispus and all his house (Acts 18 : 8), and the household of Stephanas (1 Cor. 1 : 16). It is urged that in these households there must have been infants, and hence infant baptism has scriptural warrant. Two facts render this conclusion untenable.

a. Wherever, elsewhere, the matter is clearly stated, belief always preceded baptism. There is no exception. And there is not a single instance where it is stated that a babe was baptized.

b. In each of these cases of household baptisms the strong presumptive evidence is against there being any infants baptized. Lydia was a business woman some three hundred miles from home (Acts 16 : 14). There is no evidence that she had either husband or family, and her household was doubtless made up of those whom she employed. In the case of the Philippian jailer, it is declared that they spoke the word to all that were in the house, and that he with all his house believed in God (Acts 16 : 32-34). In the case of Crispus it is distinctly declared that he believed in the Lord with all his house (Acts 18 : 8), and of the household of Stephanas it is stated: "Ye know the house of Stephanas that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have set themselves to minister unto the saints" (1 Cor. 16 : 15). If there were infants in the household

they could not minister to the saints and so would not be in the thought of the writer. Nor could they believe on Christ, and so would not be in the mind of the apostle when he spoke of the baptism of the household. A far-fetched presumption, based upon a few household baptisms, ought to have no weight whatever in the face of the positive teachings elsewhere that personal acceptance of Christ is an unvarying prerequisite to baptism.

(2) Baptism in relation to the church.

In England many Baptist churches receive unimmersed persons into church-membership, and there are a few advocates for the same course in this country. Was there anything in the early church to warrant this? This question has been closely associated with another: Is baptism the door into the local church? If so, then, of course, no one can get into the church except through the door. It is evident, however, that in New Testament times some, at least, were baptized without any reference to a local church. Such was true, for example, in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, Saul of Tarsus, and the centurion Cornelius. The door to the church is the way of entrance, and that way is the assent or vote of the body itself. But if one should decide that baptism is not strictly speaking the door of the church, he is not warranted in concluding that it is not necessary to church-membership. Regeneration is not the door to the visible church, but no one should be admitted without it. So it is practically

certain that no one was admitted to the fellowship of the early churches without baptism, and to adopt such a course now would tend to an unscriptural belittling of this ordinance and would undoubtedly promote discord and disorganization.

(3) The meaning of baptism.

Ideas of obedience, of cleansing, and of union with Christ were connected with this ordinance from the first, but came out into greater clearness as time went on. Peter emphasized the thought of obedience. This he made very plain on the day of Pentecost when he said: "Repent and be baptized every one of you." Later he wrote: "Which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3 : 21). The argument is simple. The disobedient were lost in the days of the flood. Noah by his faith and obedience was saved. The waters did not save him, but his faith brought him through the flood. So baptism does not put away the filth of the flesh—Christ must do that—but it is the interrogation of a good conscience. It is the manifestation of a conscience ready to obey, and crying out like Saul of Tarsus: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Hence, in a word, baptism is a test of a conscience ready to obey the risen Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes the thought of cleansing: "Having our hearts sprinkled

from an evil conscience, and having our body washed with pure water" (Heb. 10 : 22). "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin" and the complete washing of the body in baptism is a symbol of this gracious cleansing of the soul.

Paul linked this obedience and cleansing with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, together with our union with him by faith, and found in baptism a wonderful setting forth of all this: "Are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into his death? We were buried, therefore, with him through baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6 : 3, 4). This same conception of the symbolism of baptism as a union with Christ in death and resurrection is found in his letter to the Colossians (2 : 12). A somewhat similar thought is presented in 1 Cor. 10 : 2: "And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." As the children of Israel enveloped in cloud and sea went down into the depths with Moses and came up with him on the other side, with Egypt left behind and a new career before them, so we go down into the baptismal grave with Jesus and come up with the old life left behind, and a new course before us.

To change the form of the ordinance is to lose all this vital and beautiful meaning. Grant that

baptism is “ simply a form ” ; change the form and you have lost the substance.

2. The Lord's Supper

References to the Lord's Supper during this period are not numerous, but sufficient to set the ordinance in a clear light.

(1) The name.

At the first, as we have already seen, this service was designated as “ the Breaking of Bread.” And this expression continued to be employed (Acts 20 : 7) ; but soon the term “ The Lord's Supper ” came to be used (1 Cor. 11 : 20). We also have the expression “ The Lord's Table ” (1 Cor. 10 : 21). Are there Scripture grounds for calling the ordinance “ The Communion ” as is now frequently done? The only passage bearing upon this is the following: “ The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ? ” (1 Cor. 10 : 16): If the word communion is used for the Lord's Supper it should always be borne in mind that it is primarily and essentially a communion with Christ and not with each other.

(2) Frequency of observance.

The Jews were accustomed to the daily sacrifices at the temple. Christ came, “ the Lamb of God,” and it would seem that in commemorating Christ's sacrifice the Christians at first continued “ day by day

breaking bread" (Acts 2 : 46). Later this observance appears to have become weekly. At Troas the disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20 : 7). And in his letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote: "This do as often as ye drink it in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11 : 25).

The frequency of the observance of this ordinance seems to be left to the judgment of God's people. It ought not to be so frequent as to render it unduly common, nor so infrequent as to make it strange.

(3) The essential features and meaning of the ordinance.

In correcting the abuses into which the Corinthian church had fallen, Paul gives very important instruction in reference to this ordinance.

a. It is not an ordinary meal to satisfy hunger. "What, have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? . . . If any man is hungry let him eat at home" (1 Cor. 11 : 22, 34). The Lord's Supper is not a banquet. The Corinthians had greatly perverted it in making it a feast.

b. It is a memorial of Christ's gracious saving work. "This is my body, which is for you . . . This cup is the new covenant in my blood. . . This do in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11 : 23-26).

c. It is designed to make Christ known. "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. 11 : 26). It is an announcement of a personal faith in the Christ who died and who is coming again.

d. Abuse or neglect of this ordinance is attended with serious results. To eat and drink “in an unworthy manner,” not discerning the body of Christ, is to bring judgment upon one’s self. “For this cause many among you are weak and sickly and not a few sleep” (1 Cor. 11 : 27-30). To-day the trouble is not so much a perversion of the ordinance, as in the case of the Corinthians, as a neglect of it.



Quiz

Why should the ordinances have special study? Do the “household baptisms” support infant baptism? If not, why not? Is baptism, strictly speaking, the door to the church? Should any one be received into the church without being baptized? What is the meaning of baptism? What effect does the change of the form of the ordinance have upon the meaning? What names are used for the other ordinance? Which is preferable? How frequently should the Lord’s Supper be observed? What are the essential features of the Lord’s Supper?

Suggested Topics

Non-Baptist scholars as to N. T. baptism.

The symbolism of baptism.

The origin of infant baptism.

Modern abuses of the Lord’s Supper.

Frequency of observance of the Lord’s Supper by different denominations.

CHAPTER IX

THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIAN GIVING

WE have already seen that in the Jerusalem church there prevailed at first a communism of goods. There is no evidence, however, that a similar practice existed in any of the other churches during this period. But the question of property and of giving must have received attention everywhere. No subject with which we have to deal is of more practical importance than this, and many helpful suggestions and teachings come from the early days of Christianity.

1. The objects for which money was given

We find in these churches the beginnings of all the departments of Christian beneficence.

(1) There were the collections to help the poor.

A serious famine caused destitution and suffering, and in Antioch "the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren that dwelt in Judea; which also they did, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11 : 29, 30). And some years later among the churches of Macedonia and Achaia an offering was taken by Paul for "the poor among the saints at Jerusalem" (Rom. 15 : 25, 26).

(2) Then there was giving for the support of local work.

Paul stated the duty of the church very clearly in his letter to the Corinthians: "Know ye not that they that minister about sacred things eat of the things of the temple, and they that wait upon the altar have their portion with the altar? Even so did the Lord ordain that they that proclaim the gospel should live of the gospel." "If we sowed unto you spiritual things, is it a great matter if we shall reap your carnal things?" (1 Cor. 9 : 11-14). And to Timothy he wrote in reference to the elders: "The laborer is worthy of his hire" (1 Tim. 5 : 18). As ample provision was made in the old dispensation for the care of the priests, so those who ministered in the things of the gospel should be cared for.

(3) Offerings were also made for missionary workers.

In referring to his own work and that of Peter and the other apostles, Paul wrote: "What soldier ever serveth at his own charges?" (1 Cor. 9 : 7). This plainly implies that those who give themselves to the work of spreading the gospel are entitled to support. At the beginning of the missionary enterprise we are told: "Then when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13 : 3). It would seem that one of the essential things in sending them away must have been some provision to meet their expenses. Later Paul received help from the churches. He

wrote: "In the beginning of the gospel when I departed from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving but ye only, for even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again to my need" (Phil. 4 : 15). There is an implication here that later other churches also helped, and there is certainly a commendation of the course pursued by the Philippian church. The occasion for the writing of this Epistle was the coming of Epaphroditus to Rome with an offering for Paul.

Thus we find here the beginnings of giving for the care of the needy, for the maintenance of home work, and for the spread of the gospel in the regions beyond.

2. The basis of Christian giving

The underlying thought in the communism in the Jerusalem church was this: "Not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own" (Acts 4 : 32). Here is the basis of Christian giving. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6 : 19, 20). Since we belong to Christ, all we have belongs to him, to be held subject to his call.

In writing of the liberality of "the churches of Macedonia," Paul said: "But first they gave their own selves to the Lord, and to us through the will of God" (2 Cor. 8 : 5). With this state of things we are not surprised that Paul could say of them: "For according to their power, I bear witness, yea

and beyond their power, they gave of their own accord" (2 Cor. 8 : 3).

We are simply stewards for the Lord, and "it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4 : 2). "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8 : 9). If Christians are to abound in the grace of giving (2 Cor. 8 : 7) they must appreciate the divine sacrifice in Christ for them, and must recognize the fact that they and all they possess belong to the Lord.

3. Suggestions for Christian giving

The New Testament is a book of principles rather than rules, and yet in this matter of giving we find very comprehensive and helpful plans and requirements suggested. These call for very careful study.

(1) Each member of the church should participate.

"Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store as he may prosper" (1 Cor. 16 : 2). Some can give much more than others, but no one should withhold his offering. The poor widow could give but two mites, but she could and did give them. The churches to-day may need larger gifts, but their greatest need is more givers.

(2) This giving should be weekly.

"Upon the first day of the week," Paul urged them to put aside their offerings. The first day of

the week was their day for rest and worship, and the time to remember in a special way the claims of God upon them. Weekly giving helps to keep the heart of the giver open all the time, and the streams of beneficence continually flowing. It is certain that no better plan for supplying the treasury of the Lord with funds can be found than that of the weekly offering.

(3) The amount of the giving.

“As he may prosper” are the words in the above passage. There are several other passages bearing upon this. “He that giveth let him do it with liberality” (Rom. 12 : 8). “He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (2 Cor. 9 : 6). Referring to giving, Paul wrote again: “As ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all earnestness, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also” (2 Cor. 8 : 7).

There is no intimation that the members of the early churches practised tithing. But this fact does not prove that they may not have done so. It is certain that the call for liberal, bountiful giving, based upon the Christian’s stewardship to the Lord, could not mean less than a tenth. We cannot believe that in writing to those who were redeemed through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, that Paul ever thought for a moment that they should give less than was required under the Jewish law. On the other hand,

Paul's conception of the liberty of the gospel would not permit the placing of the Christians under the rigid exactions of the old law of tithing. The practice of tithing may be cordially commended so long as it does not pass over into legalism, and so long also as it does not represent the limit of Christian responsibility.

(4) The spirit of Christian giving.

a. Personal honor must not be sought in giving. Christ denounced the hypocrites who sounded a trumpet before them in order that they might have glory of men for their almsgiving. Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit, but they did this because they were seeking credit for very generous giving. They wanted the glory of men, but received the awful judgment of God and became a warning for all time against display and selfishness in giving.

b. Then there is the call for cheerfulness in giving. "Let each man do according as he hath purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9 : 7). "For if the readiness is there it is acceptable according as a man hath, not according as he hath not" (2 Cor. 8 : 12). Giving should be a glad, joyous service, and we should "remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20 : 35).

(5) Great wisdom and care should be exercised in reference to giving.

Paul's supreme mission was to preach the gospel,

yet he thought it worth his time to give very careful attention to supervising the collections which the churches were taking. The magnitude and complexity and ever-increasing wants of the work in modern times are so great that the best wisdom of the churches is called for to secure a wise, discriminating, and helpful dealing with the financial aspects of church life.

(6) Love underlies all true giving.

“If I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing” (1 Cor. 13 : 3). Love to Christ, and to humanity, opens the heart, extends the hand, and sanctifies the gift. “Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift” (2 Cor. 9 : 15).



Quiz

How extensively was communism adopted by the early churches? What were the objects for which contributions were made? Give the proofs in each case? What is the basis of Christian giving? What is a steward? Who should participate in giving? How frequently should offerings be made? How much should each one give? In what spirit should giving be done? What words of Christ should be remembered? How important did Paul regard this matter? Why is this subject one of special importance now? What underlies all true giving? For what should we thank God?

Suggested Topics

Weekly offerings for missions.

The percentage plan.

The question of tithing.

The best plan to raise money for the Lord's work.

The young people and church beneficence.

CHAPTER X

SURVEY AND SUMMARY

THE period which we have been studying may be regarded as closing with the destruction of Jerusalem, A. D. 70. In concluding our investigation of this remarkable period of the beginnings of Christianity we will do well to take a general survey of the ground we have been over.

1. The outward growth

Doctor Gulick, in his "Growth of the Kingdom of God," estimates that there were five million Christians at the end of the first century. Of course, this is purely conjectural. Accepting this estimate, however, as probable, it is not unreasonable to suppose that thirty years earlier the number may have reached well up into the millions. The gospel had so far extended that Paul could write to the Romans: "Your faith is proclaimed throughout the whole world" (Rom. 1 : 8). To the Colossians he spoke of the hope of the gospel "which was preached in all creation under heaven" (Col. 1 : 23), and he also referred to the gospel "which is come unto you, even as it is also in all the world" (Col. 1 : 6). While the world was used particularly of the then known world, and the language used by Paul must

not be interpreted with too rigid literalness; still it certainly tells of the remarkable spread of Christianity. The Mediterranean Sea had been practically girdled with the gospel, and many remote peoples had been reached.

2. The causes of this growth

As we read the New Testament records and bear in mind the conditions under which the early Christians wrought we see many things contributing to the success of their work. And yet it is most extraordinary that that little handful of disciples who came forth from that upper room on the day of Pentecost should have, within less than forty years, increased to millions, and filled the Roman world with their teachings.

There is, of course, but one explanation for this: God was back of and in this new and wonderful movement. But God uses means and works through agencies to carry forward his work, hence we may look for those things which specially aided in the early spread of Christianity.

(1) Conditions confronting these workers.

They were hard conditions. Sin abounded on every hand. Men were steeped in worldly ambitions and selfish pursuits. Religion was largely formalism without the vigor of faith or conviction. And yet these very conditions were in a sense favorable to the gospel. Thousands of the Jews, wearied with burdensome traditions and ceremonials, hating the rule

of Rome and longing for the Messiah, were eager to hear the Christian message. The pagan religions utterly failed to meet the deeper longings of earnest souls, and many were ready for the new religion of purity, brotherhood, and hope.

(2) The testimony of the apostles and early Christians.

The promise was that they should receive power to become witnesses. Many of them had seen and known the Lord Jesus. They had beheld his miracles and had listened to his wonderful words, and had met him face to face after his resurrection from the dead. They were sane, intelligent, honest persons, and their testimony had marvelous power.

(3) Then too, their message was a very simple and practical one.

Paul wrote to the Colossians: "Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ" (Col. 2 : 8). And to another church he declared: "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2 : 2). Those early messengers came not with a philosophy, not with a system of penances and hard exactions, not with an elaborate religious ceremonial, but with a simple message of good tidings. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have eternal life."

“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God”—Jew and Gentile alike—and to all the door of mercy stands open, and whosoever will may come. “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6 : 23). It was a direct practical appeal that all could understand and all could accept if they would.

(4) Their lives confirmed their message.

They arrested Peter and John and scourged and threatened them, but they said: “We ought to obey God rather than men,” and went fearlessly forward in their work. Paul was stoned, was scourged, was imprisoned, but nothing could stop his bearing testimony to the saving power of Jesus Christ. The early Christians were filled with the spirit of heroic sacrifice. They rejoiced “that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name” (Acts 5 : 41).

And not only this, but their lives were transformed. They were not perfect, as the letters to the churches show, but wonderful transformations were wrought. Even to the Corinthian church Paul could confidently write: “Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men” (2 Cor. 3 : 2). The love, the brotherhood, the zeal, the integrity, and the purity of these early disciples had a profound influence in the spread of the gospel.

(5) The recognition of their mission.

As in springtime all nature expands under the impulse of an inner life, so the early churches were

charged with the energy of enlargement. The Holy Spirit filled them with a consciousness of a mission so that they could not keep still. "We cannot but speak the things we saw and heard" (Acts 4 : 19). "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel" (1 Cor. 9 : 16). This was not confined to the few, for when the Jerusalem church was scattered they went preaching the word. The essential spirit of the kingdom of God is conquest. "Make disciples of all the nations." It was this conception which dominated the early workers and gave them such marvelous victories for the gospel of Christ. We to-day, may well study with great care the elements of power in the early churches that we may the better meet the responsibilities which confront us.

3. The great problems of this period

The church of God has always been confronted with grave problems. Each period has its own questions and conflicts.

(1) The most serious problem of this early period was that of Judaism. A strong party was determined to make Christianity little else than an addendum to Judaism. The Gentiles could become Christians, but they must at the same time accept the Jewish rites. The decision of the conference at Jerusalem, as we have seen, was a great victory for the larger conception of the gospel, and yet it did not stop the efforts of this Judaizing party. Paul's letters reveal the persistency and power of these

workers. His long imprisonment at Cæsarea, and at Rome, and probably his death, can be credited to the influence of his Judaistic enemies. It is urged by some that the awful cruelties of the persecutions under Nero were instigated by Poppæa Sabina, a convert to Judaism. But the true conception of the gospel had been planted throughout the churches, and with the destruction of Jerusalem, this Judaizing influence practically ceased.

(2) But another problem—that of Christianity's relation to paganism—was coming to the front. The conflict at Ephesus was with the worshipers of the goddess Diana (Acts 19 : 23-41). It soon became apparent, that wherever Christianity went, it was the uncompromising enemy of all other religions. Christ could not accept a place with the other gods in the Roman Pantheon. And so the conflict with paganism began which was to continue more than two hundred years and be marked by the ten fearful persecutions led by the Roman emperors in their fruitless efforts to stamp out the Christian religion. The first of these persecutions, instigated by the infamous Nero, occurred just at the close of the period which we are studying. The historian Tacitus, who lived at this time, speaking of this persecution, says of Nero: "He inflicted the most exquisite tortures on those men who under the vulgar appellation of Christians were already branded with deserved infamy." He, of course, wrote from a pagan point of view. He states that

a vast multitude was put to death in a most shocking manner. But this awful persecution set in still clearer light the heroic and noble character of the Christians, and added great emphasis to the power of the gospel truth; "the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church."

A closing thought

The early growth of Christianity gave promise of a speedy conquest of the whole world. But there came compromise, controversy, and failure, and the dark ages followed. But modern times have witnessed a great revival of primitive faith and missionary zeal. The Holy Spirit is again leading on for the world's evangelization. There are enemies within the churches and without, who are opposing the work of God's people. It is a great campaign: in many respects the greatest of the ages. It looks as though it might be the closing campaign of the centuries. We need more of the faith, the prayer, the zeal, the sense of personal responsibility, and the enduement of the Holy Spirit which characterized the early Christians in their heroic work of conquest for Jesus Christ.



Quiz

What is Doctor Gulick's estimate of the number of Christians at the close of the first century? What expressions used by Paul indicate the wide extent of the spread of Christianity? What under-

lying fact accounts for this growth? In what way were existing conditions in the Jewish and pagan world favorable to the spread of Christianity? Why did the testimony of the early Christians have special power? What was the character of their message? How did their lives reenforce their message? With what did the Holy Spirit fill the early churches? What serious problem extended throughout this period? What great event marked its end? In what way did Christianity come in conflict with paganism? What was the first of the “ten persecutions?”

Suggested Topics

Characteristics of a New Testament church.

The destruction of Jerusalem.

The persecution under Nero.

References to the Christians by Tacitus.

The needs of the churches to-day.

